CHAUVEL ALI

THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS

1. DEATH WALKS WITH ME

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1. DEATH WALKS WITH ME

STORY
David Chauvel

ART
Roberto Ali

COLORS
Walter

MIZUSHIRO PLAIN, 87TH YEAR OF THE WILLOW, HOUR OF THE SNAKE...
GENERAL!!

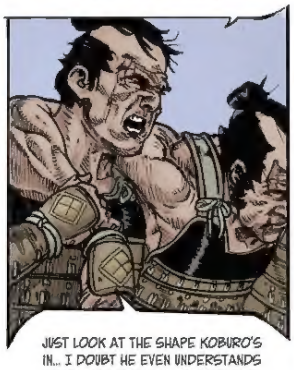
GENERAL!!
THE ENEMY'S ON OUR HEELS!!
WITHIN TWO HOURS, LORD GAYU'S HEADHUNTERS WILL HAVE CAUGHT UP AND DECIMATED OUR REAR GUARD...
GENERAL?
GENERAL?
SO, VICTORY WASN'T ENOUGH FOR THEM. THEY WON'T BE SATISFIED UNTIL THEY'VE WIPED OUT EVERY LAST MEMBER OF THE ZUNI CLAN!!
TO SHOW MERCY TO ONE'S ENEMY IS TO BE CRUEL TO ONESELF...
ASHOJO!!
YES, SIR!!
ROUND UP A DOZEN LANCERS, GO FIND ANYONE WHO IS SLOWING US DOWN... AND KILL THEM.
YES, SIR!!
MOVE IT!! PICK UP THE PACE IF YOU DON'T WANT THIS FIELD TO END UP BEING OUR GRAVEYARD!!

DIDJA HEAR THAT? THEY'RE SAY'IN' WE GOTTA SPEED UP!

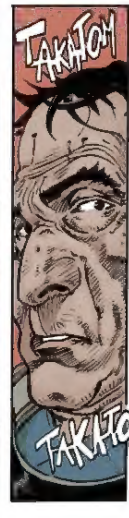
WITH THAT WOUND? DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH!
WE'RE LUCKY ENOUGH THEY DIDN'T MAKE US CARRY 'IM...

YEAH, WELL, WOUNDED OR NOT, HE'D BETTER KEEP UP IF HE PLANS TO KEEP ON LIVING.

SETTLE DOWN, OLD MAN!!
THE GAY'U CLAN MASSACRED US THANKS TO THE FIGHTING MONKS FROM THE MONASTERY OF THE LEANING CRANE SHOWING UP AT THE LAST MINUTE. WE'RE HEADING HOME WOUNDED AND DEFEATED... HOW COULD IT GET ANY WORSE?!
YOU'RE ALL YOUNG AND IGNORANT... VICTORY ISN'T ENOUGH. THE GAY'U WILL WANT TO EXTERMINATE ALL THE ZUN!! EVERY LAST ONE!!
THAT'S HOW IT'S BEEN BETWEEN THE CLANS FOR GENERATIONS.


RIGHT!! AND AS LONG AS THEY CAN FIND FOOLS LIKE US THAT THEY CAN FORCE TO DO THE FIGHTING FOR THEM, THINGS AREN'T GONNA CHANGE.
JUST LOOK AT THE SHAPE KOBURO'S IN... I DOUBT HE EVEN UNDERSTANDS ANYTHING WE'RE SAYING ANYMORE.

NOW THAT THE FOG IS LIFTING, THE GAY'U WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE FINDING US, SO TAKE MY ADVICE AND...


TAKATOM
TAKATOM

GET DOWN!! NOW!!

HUH? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU--
SHUT UP, LIE DOWN, AND PLAY DEAD!!

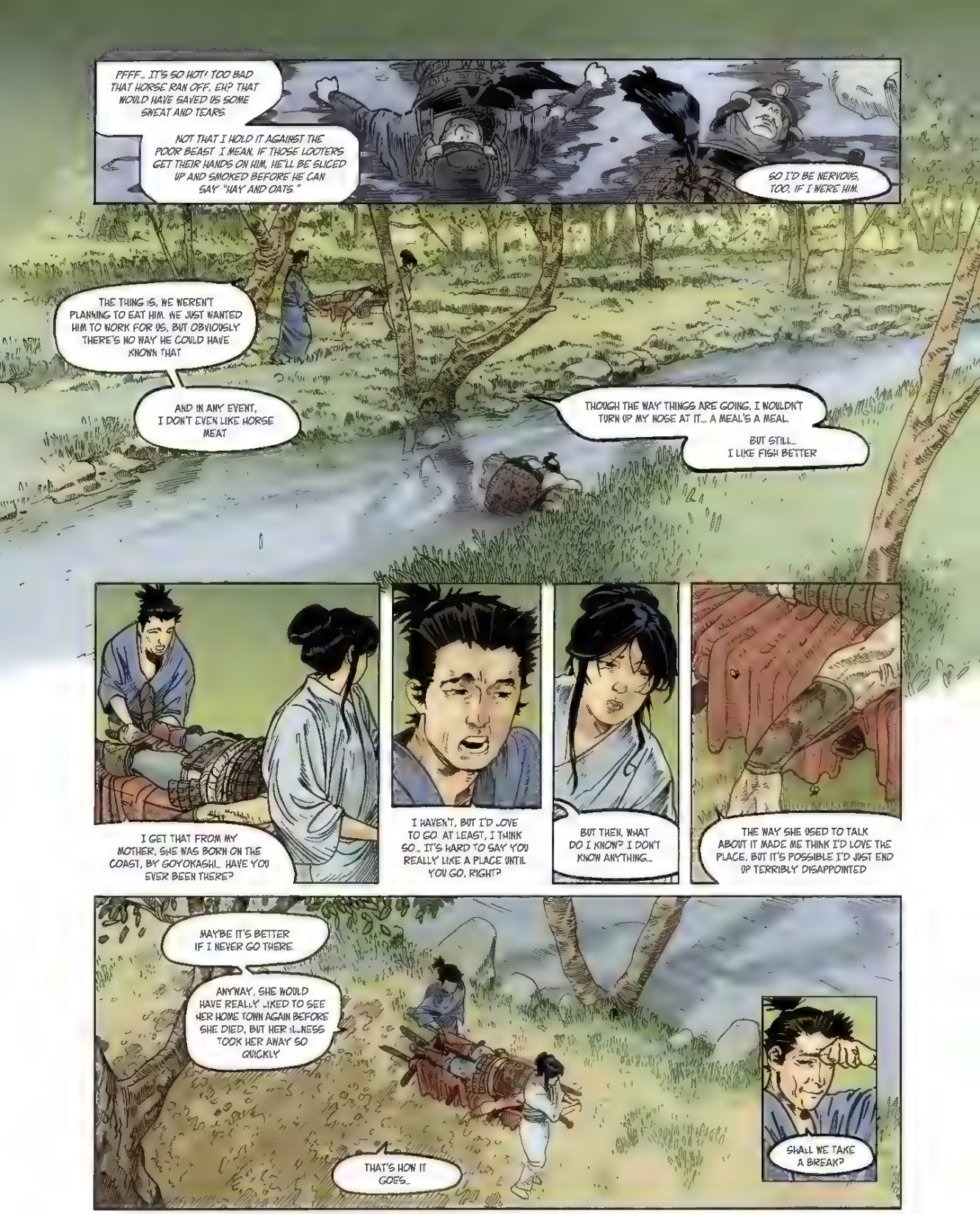
KOBURO!! GET DOWN!!

KOBURO...
QUIET, YOU FOOL, OR WE'LL ALL END UP LIKE HIM!

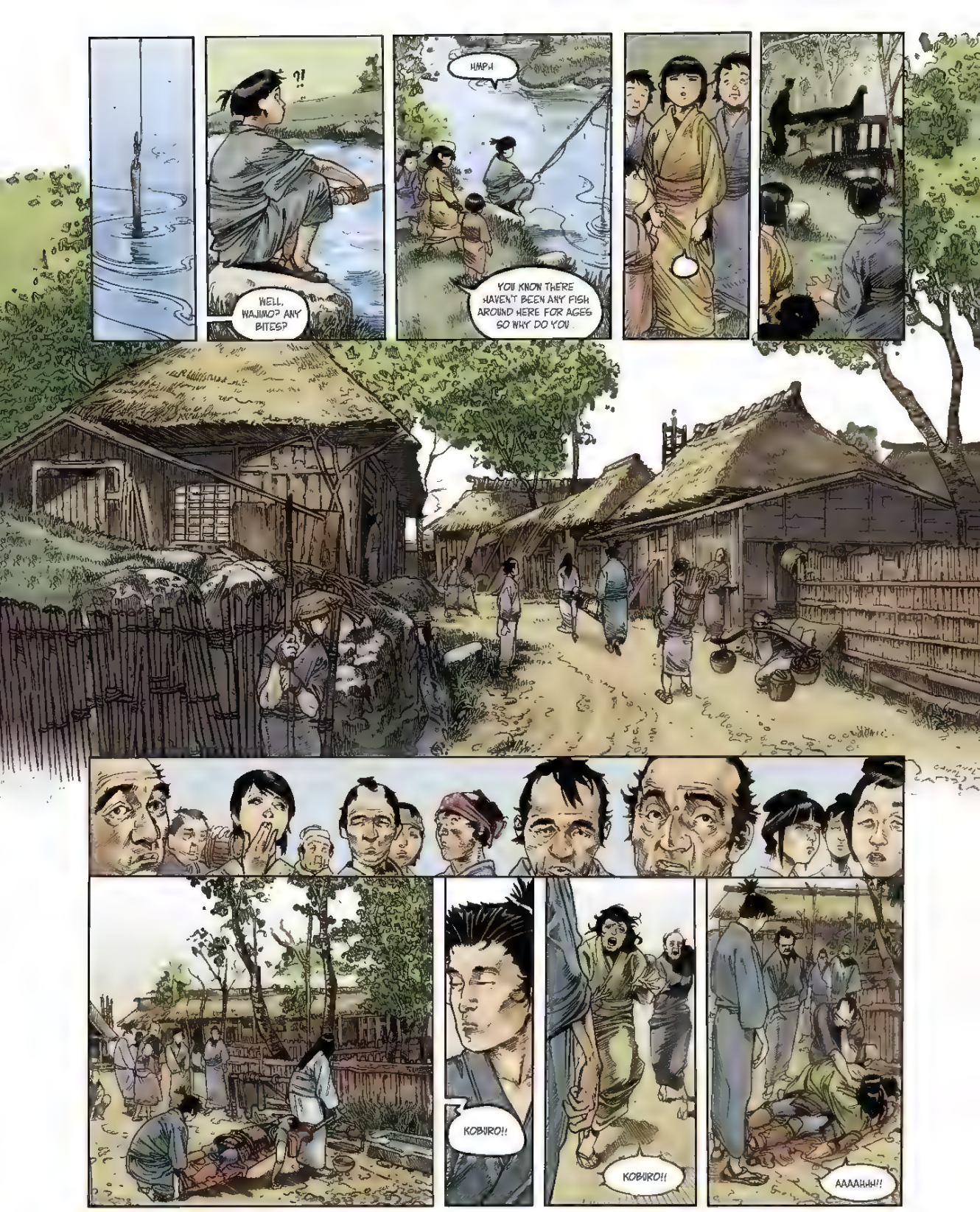
HEY, IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY?
ABOUT WHAT?
I HEARD SOME OLD VILLAGERS IN KONDO SAYIN' THAT IF YOU LOOK INTO THE EYE OF A DEAD MAN YOU CAN SEE THE LAST THING HE SAW BEFORE HE DIED.
SOMETIMES EVEN HIS KILLER.
HA HA.
HEH HEH HEH.
BETTER NOT, KID...
WHY DON'T YOU GO TAKE A LOOK FOR YERSELF?
HEY, LOOK AT THIS GUY'S ARMOUR!
NICE! HOW'S THE SWORD?
CRACKED.
TOO BAD... SEE IF HE HAD ANY MONEY STASHED ON HIM.
WELL?
I LOOKED REAL GOOD.
BUT NOTHIN'... NOTHIN' AT ALL.
YOU SHOULDN'T LISTEN TO THE STORIES IN KONDO, MY BOY. THEY KNOW LESS ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH THAN A MOUNTAIN GOAT.
HA HA HA!!

SHOULD WE TAKE HIS STUFF?
YOUR FLEABAG OVER THERE? YOU KIDDIN'? HE'S GOT NOTHIN' LEFT BUT HIS SOUL, THAT IS IF HE'S EVEN GOT ONE TO OFFER.
DON'T CALL HIM A FLEABAG. THAT GUY WAS A PEASANT LIKE YOU AND ME BEFORE HE CAME HERE TO DIE LIKE A DOG.
DON'T START YOUR MORALIZIN', MASAMURA.
I'M NOT TRYING TO START ANYTHING. BUT I DON'T LIKE WHAT I'M DOING HERE AND NO ONE CAN MAKE ME HAPPY ABOUT IT.
NOBODY LIKES IT BUT WHADDAYA EXPECT? IF WE DON'T DO IT THEN SOMEONE ELSE WILL COME ALONG AND DO IT INSTEAD.
THAT'S NOT A REASON NOR AN EXCUSE.
WE DON'T NEED AN EXCUSE TO TAKE WHAT WE CAN AN' SELL IT TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.
MAYBE YOU FORGOT, BUT BEFORE THE BIG BATTLE WE ALL SIGNED UP FOR, THOSE GUYS CAME THROUGH OUR TOWNS, TAKIN' ALL OUR RICE, DRIED FISH, AN' HENS. THEY TOOK WHATEVER THEY COULD EAT AN' LEFT US WITH NOTHIN' BUT GRUMBLIN' BELLIES. AN' YOU'RE SAYIN' THEY WAS JUST "PEASANTS LIKE YOU AND ME"!
KATSURO'S RIGHT!! YOU AIN'T GOT A WIFE OR KIDS TO FEED!!
YOU FORGET THERE'S A FAMINE?!
YEAH, SO SHUT IT!!
YOU'RE ALWAYS BUTTIN' IN AND TELLIN' US WHAT WE CAN AND CAN'T DO. YOU ACT LIKE A PRIEST, MASAMURA, AND ONE OF THESE DAYS IT'S GONNA GET YOU IN TROUBLE, YOU'LL SEE.
HEY, WATCHA DOIN' THERE?
CAN'T YOU TELL?
HE'S ALL BLOATED. I CAN'T GET HIS ARMOR OFF, SO I'M CUTTING HIM OUT OF IT. I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE HE REALLY NEEDS IT ANY--
...

WHAT IN THE...
WELL I'LL BE HANGED...
GULP...
...
WOULD ONE OF YOU BE WILLING TO HELP ME TRANSPORT A BODY BACK TO MY VILLAGE?
DEPENDS. WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?
ME.
WHOEVER HELPS ME CAN HAVE ME.
WELL, THEN, WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR? LET'S GO!


PFFF... IT'S SO HOT! TOO BAD THAT HORSE RAN OFF, EH? THAT WOULD HAVE SAVED US SOME SWEAT AND TEARS.
NOT THAT I HOLD IT AGAINST THE POOR BEAST. I MEAN, IF THOSE LOOTERS GET THEIR HANDS ON HIM, HE'LL BE SLICED UP AND SMOKED BEFORE HE CAN SAY "HAY AND OATS."
SO I'D BE NERVOUS, TOO, IF I WERE HIM.
THE THING IS, WE WEREN'T PLANNING TO EAT HIM. WE JUST WANTED HIM TO WORK FOR US, BUT OBVIOUSLY THERE'S NO WAY HE COULD HAVE KNOWN THAT.
AND IN ANY EVENT, I DON'T EVEN LIKE HORSE MEAT.
THOUGH THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, I WOULDN'T TURN UP MY NOSE AT IT... A MEAL'S A MEAL.
BUT STILL... I LIKE FISH BETTER.
I GET THAT FROM MY MOTHER. SHE WAS BORN ON THE COAST, BY GOYOKASHI... HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THERE?
I HAVEN'T, BUT I'D LOVE TO GO. AT LEAST, I THINK SO... IT'S HARD TO SAY YOU REALLY LIKE A PLACE UNTIL YOU GO, RIGHT?
BUT THEN, WHAT DO I KNOW? I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING...
THE WAY SHE USED TO TALK ABOUT IT MADE ME THINK I'D LOVE THE PLACE, BUT IT'S POSSIBLE I'D JUST END UP TERRIBLY DISAPPOINTED.
MAYBE IT'S BETTER IF I NEVER GO THERE.
ANYWAY, SHE WOULD HAVE REALLY LIKED TO SEE HER HOME TOWN AGAIN BEFORE SHE DIED, BUT HER ILLNESS TOOK HER AWAY SO QUICKLY.
THAT'S HOW IT GOES...
SHALL WE TAKE A BREAK?

YOU DON'T TALK MUCH, DO YOU?
YOU TALK ENOUGH FOR TWO
I GET THAT A LOT, BUT I DISAGREE
SO, WHO IS HE? YOUR BROTHER?
MY FIANCÉ
AH.
I SEE..
SO, UH..
..THAT THING YOU SAID EARLIER WERE YOU SERIOUS?
YES, WHY?
OH.. NO REASON
NO REASON.


?!
WELL, WAJIMO? ANY BITES?
HMPH
YOU KNOW THERE HAVEN'T BEEN ANY FISH AROUND HERE FOR AGES SO WHY DO YOU...
KOBURO!!
KOBURO!!
AAAAHH!!!

SADAKYO?!

ZAEMON... DID YOU SEE MY ZAEMON THERE?! TELL ME!! IS HE STILL ALIVE?!

NO

I DON'T KNOW.

HEY!! WHO ARE YOU?

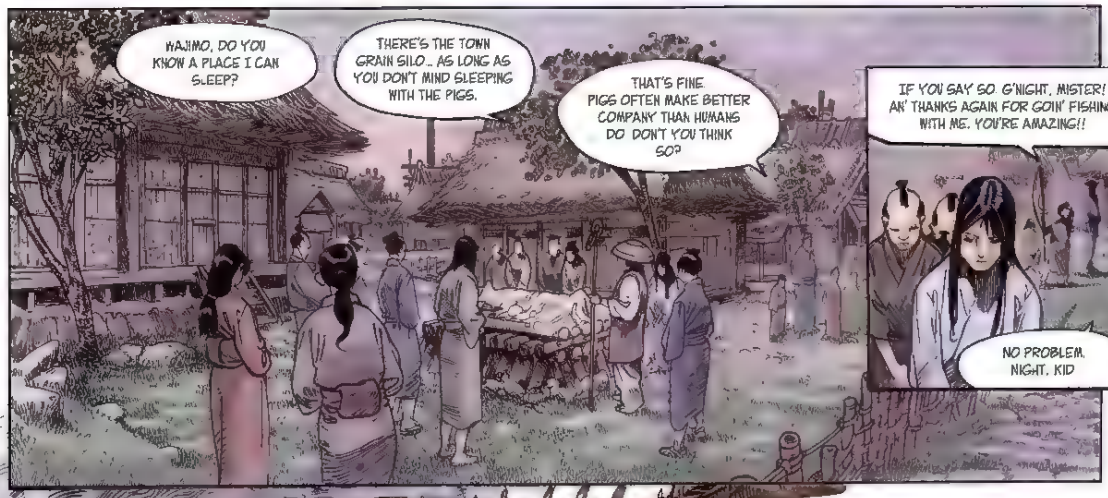
WHAT'S YER NAME?
YOU A WARRIOR?
YOU THE ONE THAT KILLED KOBURO?

WELL, I'M NOT SCARED OF YOU!!
WAJIMO THINKS HE'S A WARRIOR
HA HA!
YEAH, A WARRIOR WHO'S HEADED FOR A SPANKING

SAY, KID...
GASP...

...IS THAT A FISHING POLE YOU'VE GOT THERE? ANYTHING BITING?
YES.
WELL, UM, I MEAN, NO, SIR, I...

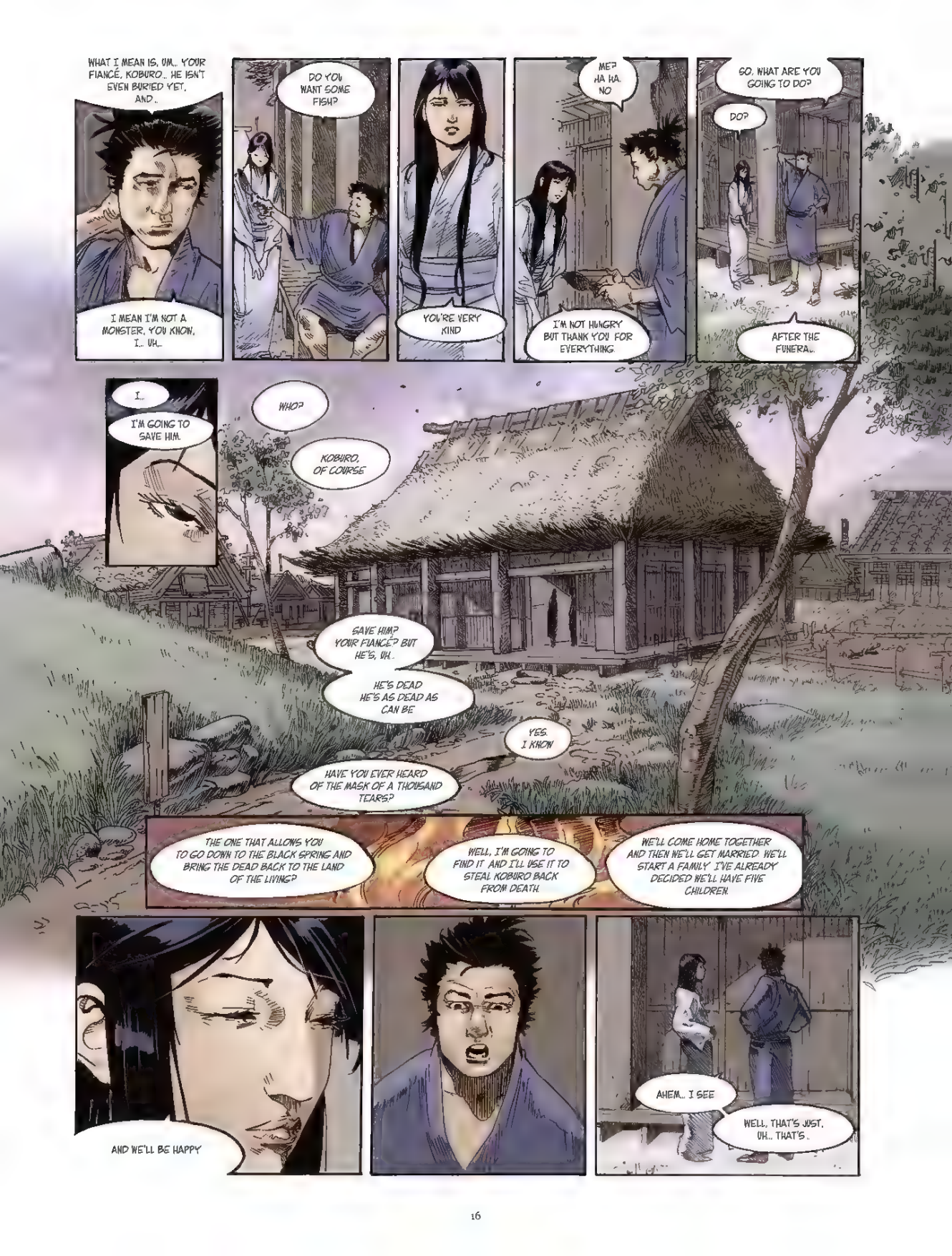
WHY DON'T WE GO TAKE ANOTHER LOOK?
I JUST LOVE FISHING!!

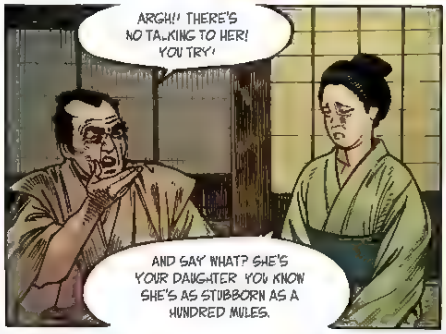

WAJIMO, DO YOU KNOW A PLACE I CAN SLEEP?
THERE'S THE TOWN GRAIN SILO... AS LONG AS YOU DON'T MIND SLEEPING WITH THE PIGS.
THAT'S FINE. PIGS OFTEN MAKE BETTER COMPANY THAN HUMANS DO. DON'T YOU THINK SO?
IF YOU SAY SO. G'NIGHT, MISTER! AN' THANKS AGAIN FOR GOIN' FISHING WITH ME. YOU'RE AMAZING!!
NO PROBLEM. NIGHT, KID

AH, IT'S YOU. I WAS JUST.
UM, YOU OK?

YOU HONORED YOUR END OF THE DEAL... I'M HERE TO DO MINE.

WHAT?!
OH, RIGHT, RIGHT. YOU CAME TO. HA HA... I GET IT, VERY WELL, YES--
I MEAN, NO!!

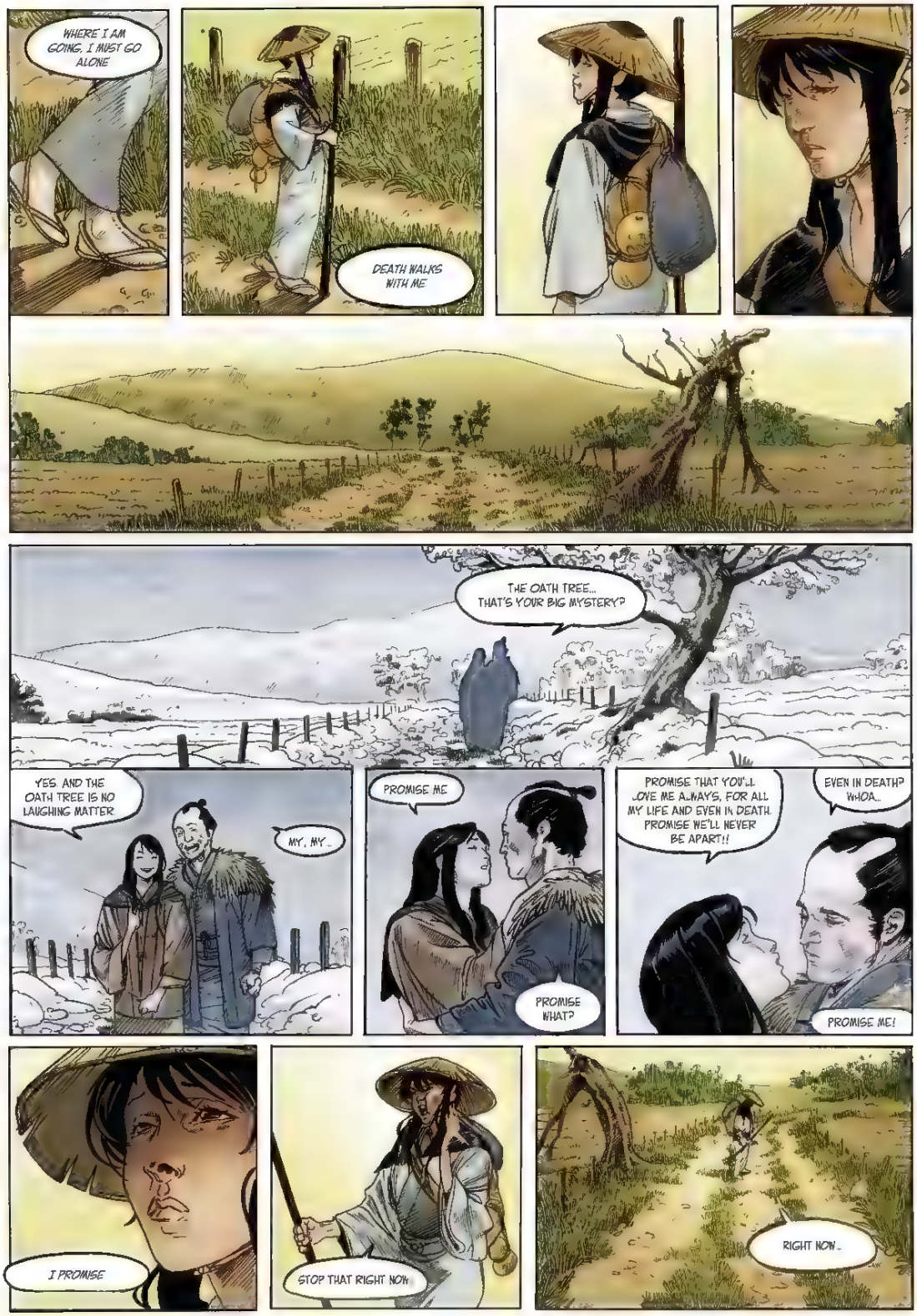

WHAT I MEAN IS, UM.. YOUR FIANCÉ, KOBURO.. HE ISN'T EVEN BURIED YET, AND..
I MEAN I'M NOT A MONSTER, YOU KNOW, I.. UH..
DO YOU WANT SOME FISH?
YOU'RE VERY KIND
ME? HA HA. NO
I'M NOT HUNGRY BUT THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING.
SO, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
DO?
AFTER THE FUNERA..
I..
I'M GOING TO SAVE HIM.
WHO?
KOBURO, OF COURSE
SAVE HIM? YOUR FIANCÉ? BUT HE'S, UH..
HE'S DEAD HE'S AS DEAD AS CAN BE
YES. I KNOW
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS?
THE ONE THAT ALLOWS YOU TO GO DOWN TO THE BLACK SPRING AND BRING THE DEAD BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING?
WELL, I'M GOING TO FIND IT AND I'LL USE IT TO STEAL KOBURO BACK FROM DEATH.
WE'LL COME HOME TOGETHER AND THEN WE'LL GET MARRIED. WE'LL START A FAMILY. I'VE ALREADY DECIDED WE'LL HAVE FIVE CHILDREN.
AND WE'LL BE HAPPY
AHEM... I SEE
WELL, THAT'S JUST, UH.. THAT'S..



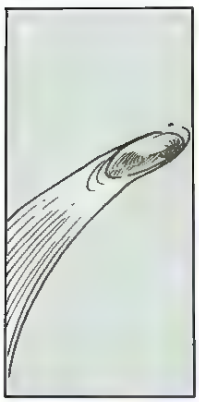
WHEN KOBURO LEFT FOR WAR, I PROMISED I WOULD BRING HIM BACK, NOT JUST TO THE VILLAGE, BUT THAT I'D EVEN GO AND FIND HIM IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD IF I HAD TO.

YOU'RE STILL HERE?
AS YOU CAN SEE...
WHEN ARE YOU HEADING OUT TO LOOK FOR THAT.. MASK OF A THOUSAND WHATSITS?
WHY DO YOU CARE?
WELL, I'VE DECIDED TO TRAVEL. SEE A BIT OF THE COUNTRY, SO I THOUGHT--

NO
THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR HELP. TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT IN RETURN AND I PROMISE I'LL GIVE IT TO YOU IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.
BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW YOU TO COME WITH ME

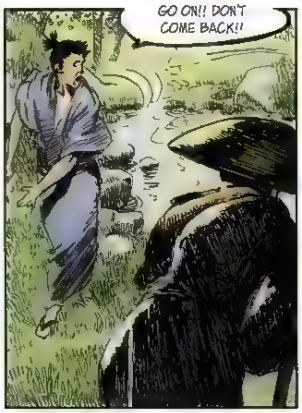

WHERE I AM GOING, I MUST GO ALONE
DEATH WALKS WITH ME
THE OATH TREE... THAT'S YOUR BIG MYSTERY?
YES. AND THE OATH TREE IS NO LAUGHING MATTER
MY, MY..
PROMISE ME
PROMISE WHAT?
PROMISE THAT YOU'LL LOVE ME ALWAYS, FOR ALL MY LIFE AND EVEN IN DEATH. PROMISE WE'LL NEVER BE APART!!
EVEN IN DEATH? WHOA..
PROMISE ME!
I PROMISE
STOP THAT RIGHT NOW.
RIGHT NOW..

?!
GGRRRR
GGRRRR
GRRODRRR
!



KAN!!

BUZZ OFF!! SCRAM!!


GO ON!! DON'T COME BACK!!

MASAMURA...

GIVE ME THAT
WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU--

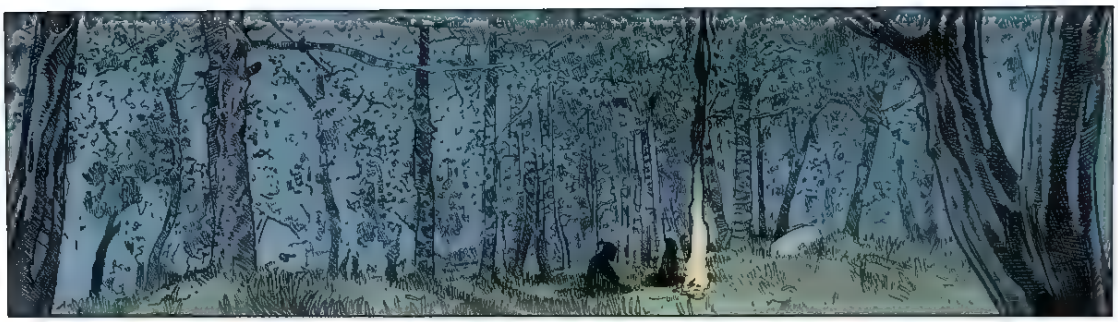
LOOK THERE.

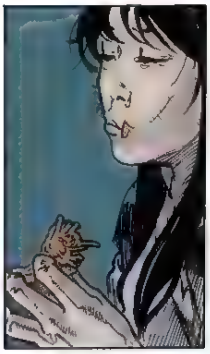
THAT'S WHAT DREW THOSE STRAY DOGS. AND MOST LIKELY CONTAMINATED THE WATER YOU WERE ABOUT TO DRINK

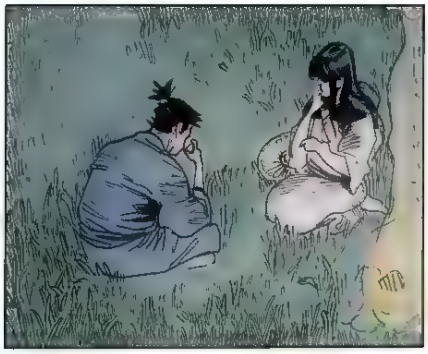
THANKS.

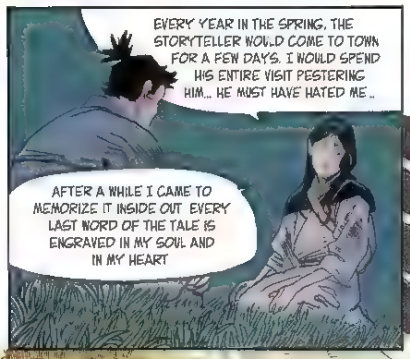
YOU CAN THANK ME LATER NOW. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I HAVE NO INTENTION OF SPENDING THE NIGHT HERE.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND
THERE'S NOTHING TO UNDERSTAND. WE'RE HEADING THE SAME WAY, THAT'S ALL.
WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK HOME TO YOUR VILLAGE?
I TOLD YOU, I WANT TO SEE THE COUNTRY
YOU WOULDN'T LET ME PAY YOU BEFORE AND I CAN'T PAY YOU NOW FOR SAVING ME FROM THOSE DOGS THAT I
BAAAH... I'M TOO HUNGRY TO ARGUE
...UCKILY, I, UH... FOUND THIS WHILE I WAS WALKING.
WHO DID YOU STEAL THAT CHICKEN FROM?
I DIDN'T STEAL IT, I REQUISITIONED IT...
WE'RE ON A SECRET MISSION, REMEMBER WE HAVE TO FIND THAT FAMOUS MAGICAL MASK!!
SORRY, THAT...
...WAS STUPID
I'M HAPPY YOU'RE LETTING ME ACCOMPANY YOU AS FAR AS THE ISLE OF... ISLE OF...?
MOHI
RIGHT ANYWAY, YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE A CHOICE. YOU'L... NEVER MAKE IT THERE ALIVE ON YOUR OWN... IT'S NOT GUARANTEED EVEN IF I COME ALONG WITH YOU.









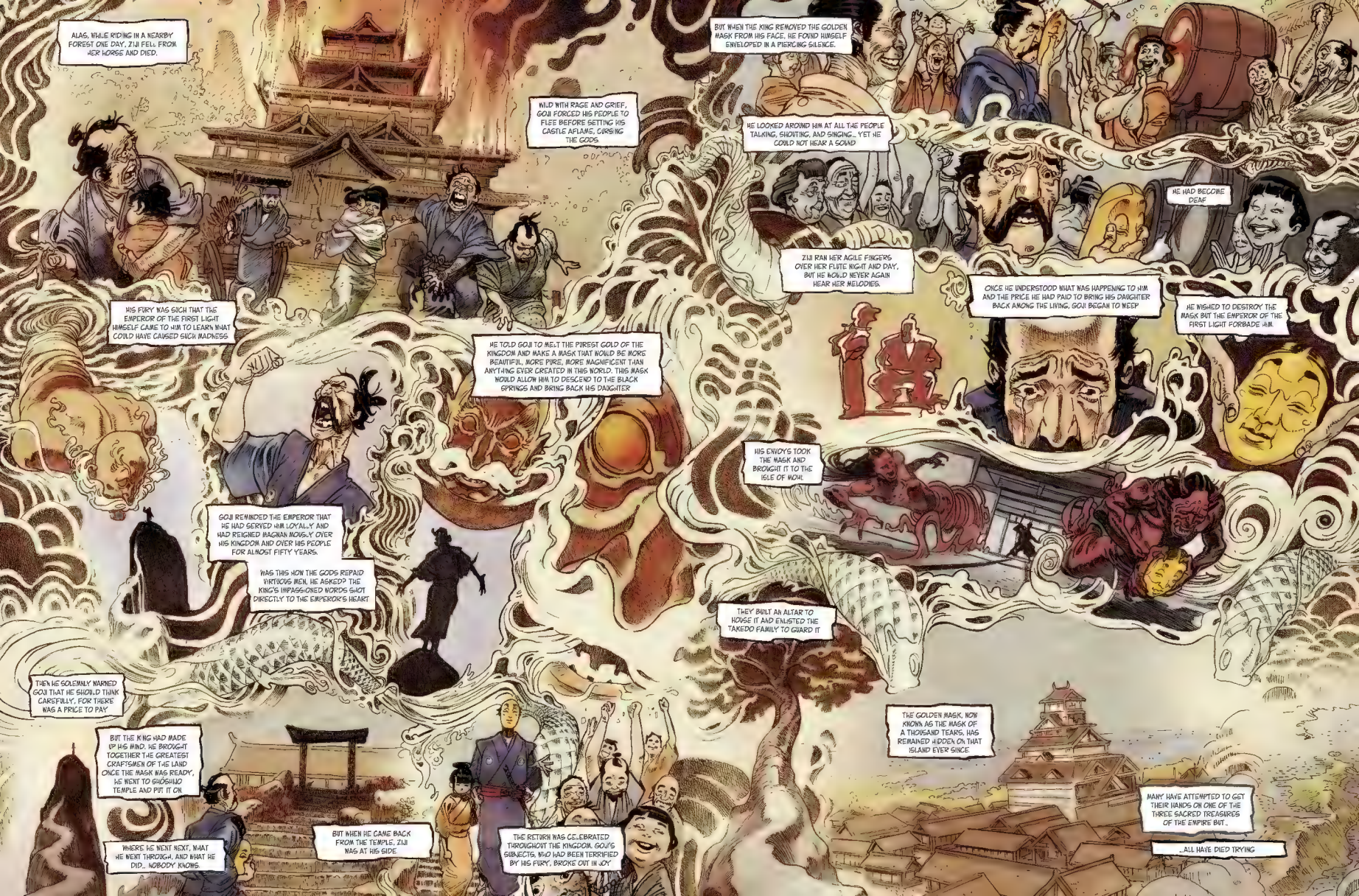
AT THE DAWN OF TIME, THERE WAS ONLY ONE KINGDOM ON EARTH: THE LAND OF KI

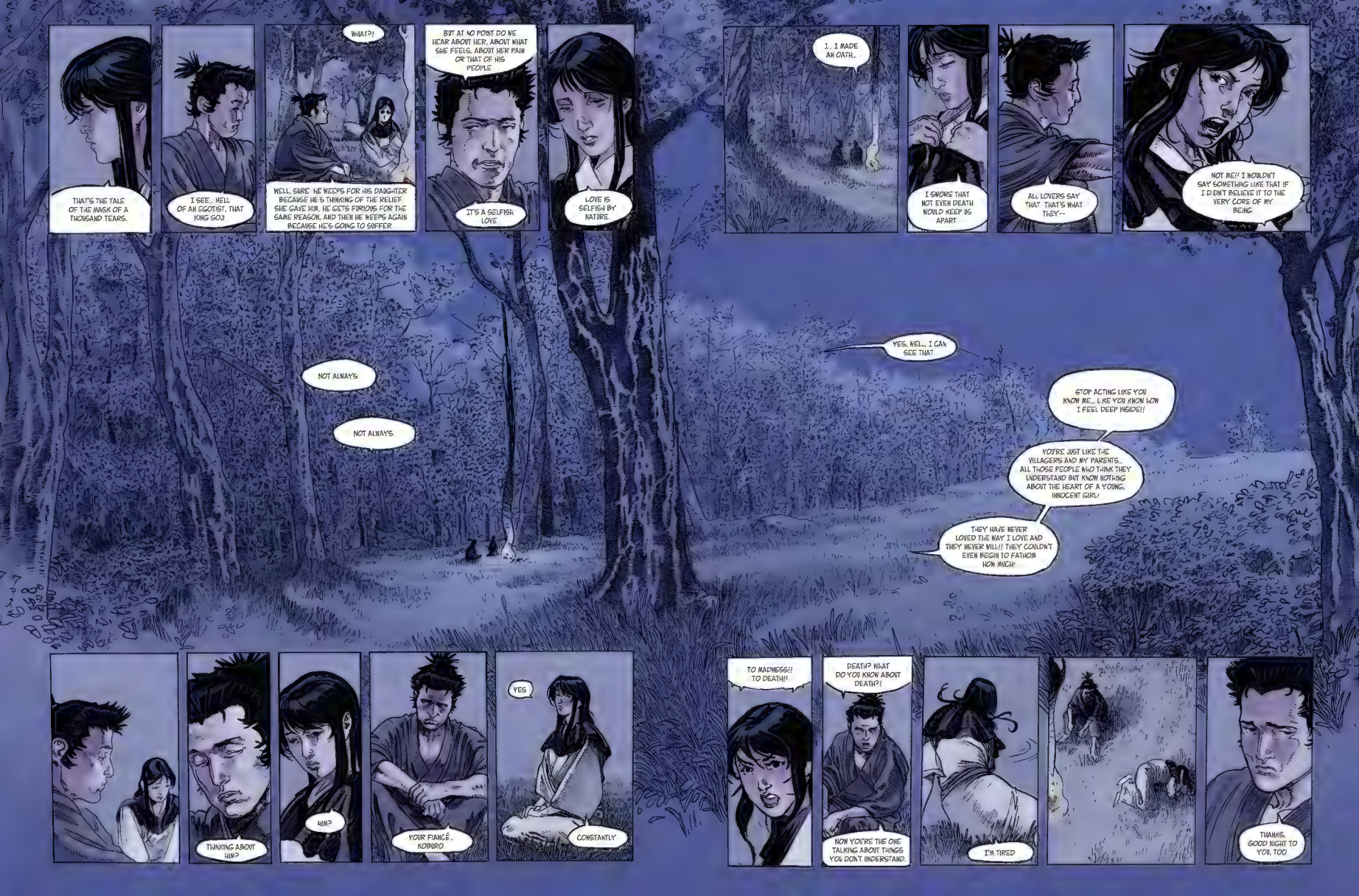
A PROSPEROUS REALM WHERE EVERYONE LIVED IN PEACE AND HARMONY DURING THE REIGN OF KING GOJI.

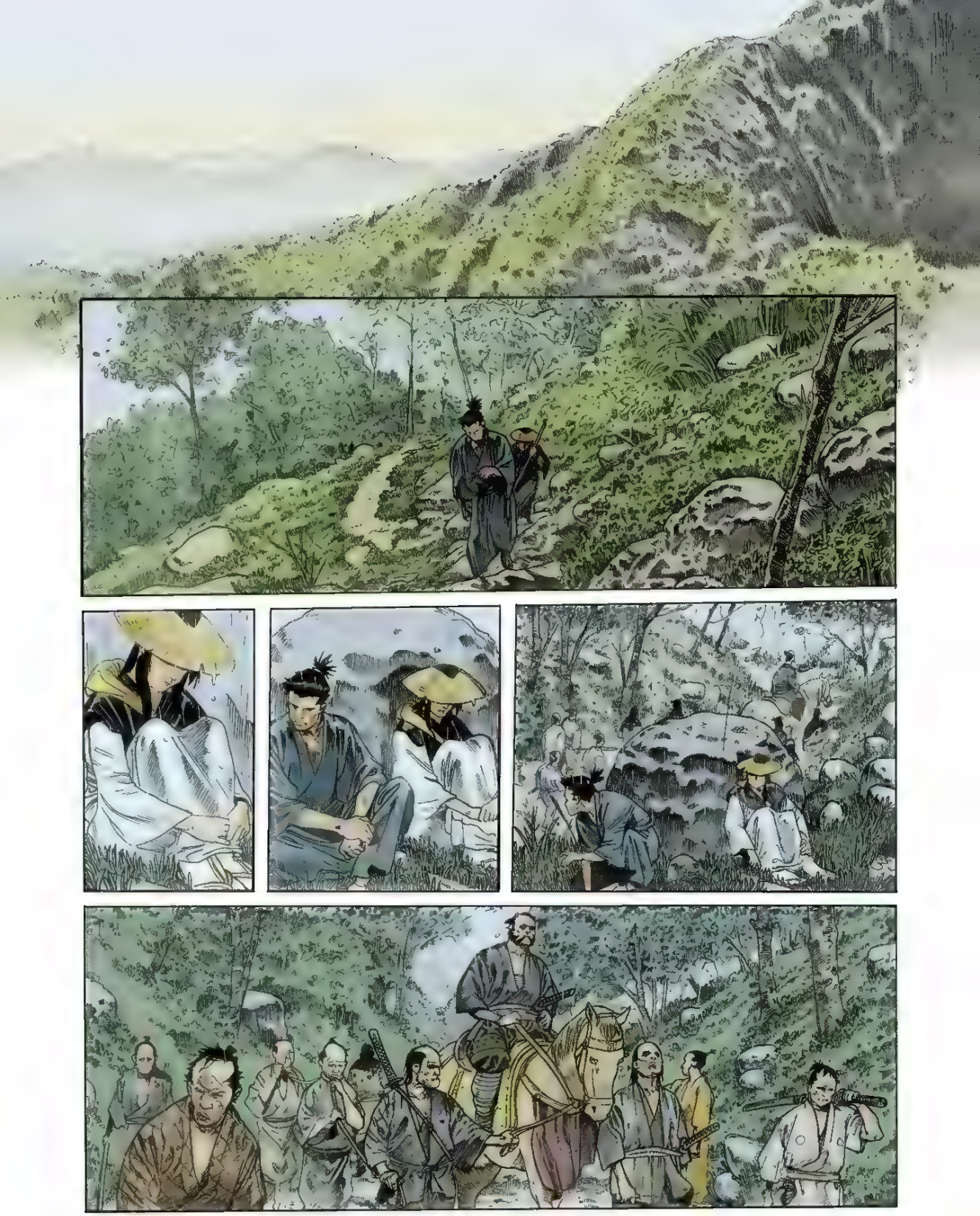
HE HAD THREE DAUGHTERS: KAJI, LIJI, AND ZIJI, HIS FAVORITE.

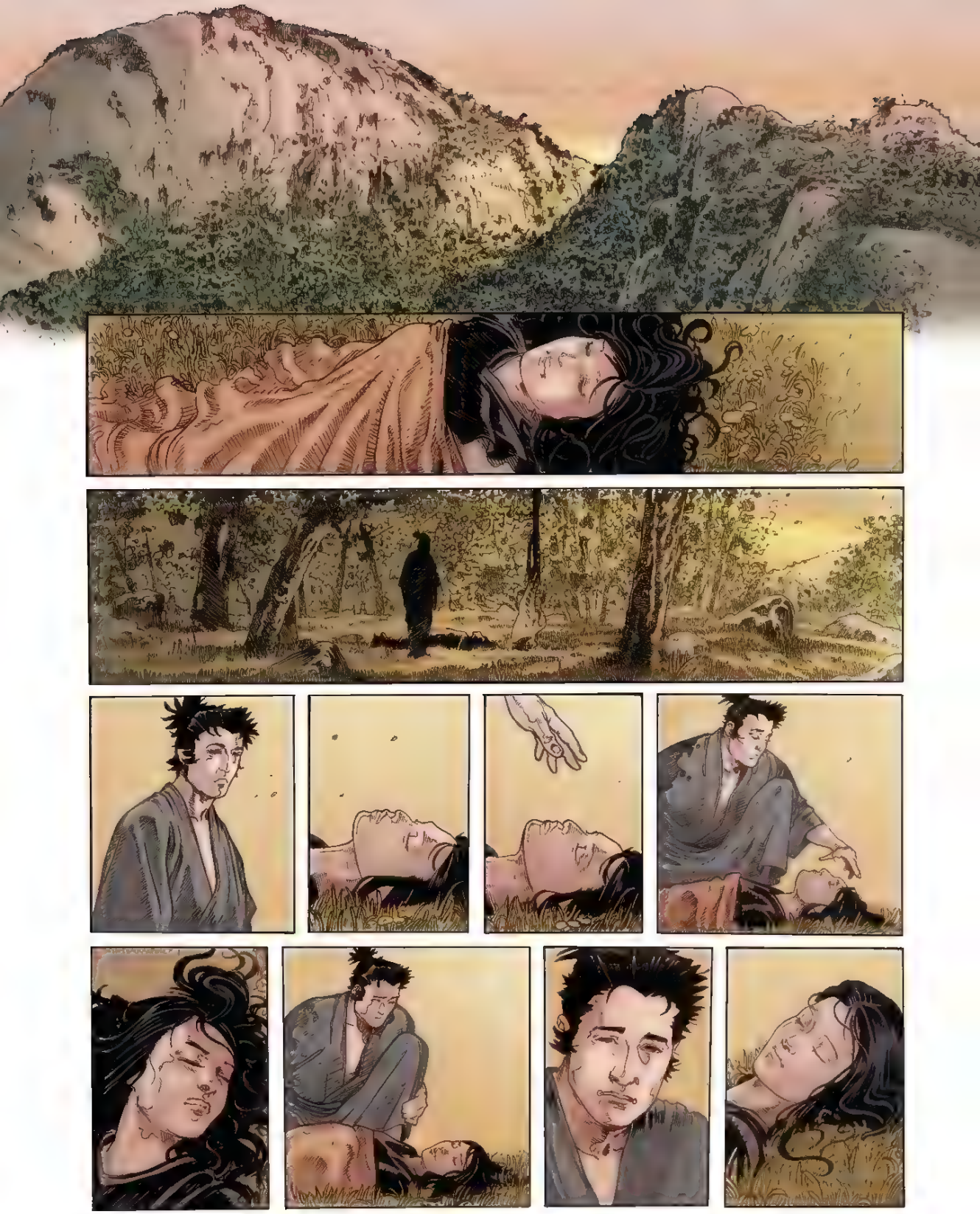
GOJI SUFFERED FROM TERRIBLE HEADACHES, ONLY ABLE TO FIND RELIEF WHEN ZIJI PLAYED HER FLUTE FOR HIM.

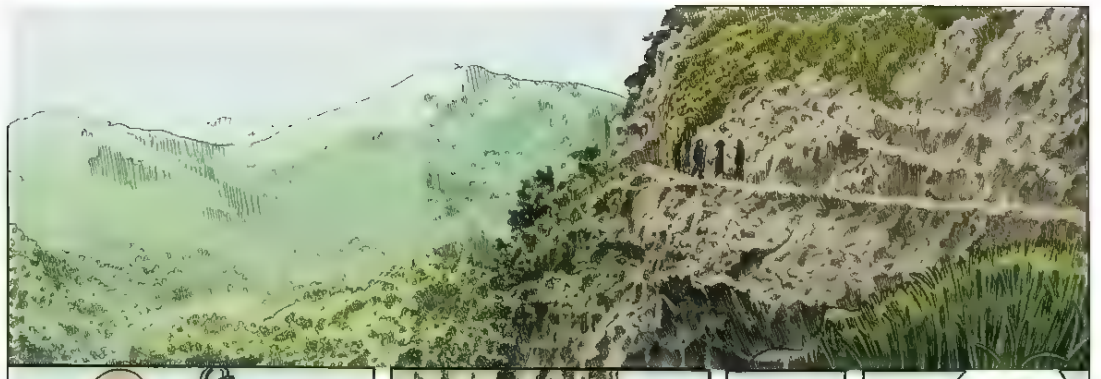
THEY PASSED MANY AN HOUR LIKE THIS, AND OVER TIME A POWERFUL BOND DEVELOPED BETWEEN THEM.


ALAS, WHILE RIDING IN A NEARBY FOREST ONE DAY, ZIJI FELL FROM HER HORSE AND DIED.
WILD WITH RAGE AND GRIEF, GOJI FORCED HIS PEOPLE TO FLEE BEFORE SETTING HIS CASTLE AFLAME, CURSING THE GODS.
BUT WHEN THE KING REMOVED THE GOLDEN MASK FROM HIS FACE, HE FOUND HIMSELF ENVELOPED IN A PIERCING SILENCE.
HE LOOKED AROUND HIM AT ALL THE PEOPLE TALKING, SHOUTING, AND SINGING... YET HE COULD NOT HEAR A SOUND
HE HAD BECOME DEAF
ZIJI RAN HER AGILE FINGERS OVER HER FLUTE NIGHT AND DAY, BUT HE WOULD NEVER AGAIN HEAR HER MELODIES.
ONCE HE UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO HIM AND THE PRICE HE HAD PAID TO BRING HIS DAUGHTER BACK AMONG THE LIVING, GOJI BEGAN TO WEEP
HE WISHED TO DESTROY THE MASK BUT THE EMPEROR OF THE FIRST LIGHT FORBADE HIM.
HIS FURY WAS SUCH THAT THE EMPEROR OF THE FIRST LIGHT HIMSELF CAME TO HIM TO LEARN WHAT COULD HAVE CAUSED SUCH MADNESS.
HE TOLD GOJI TO MELT THE PUREST GOLD OF THE KINGDOM AND MAKE A MASK THAT WOULD BE MORE BEAUTIFUL, MORE PURE, MORE MAGNIFICENT THAN ANYTHING EVER CREATED IN THIS WORLD. THIS MASK WOULD ALLOW HIM TO DESCEND TO THE BLACK SPRINGS AND BRING BACK HIS DAUGHTER
HIS ENVOYS TOOK THE MASK AND BROUGHT IT TO THE ISLE OF NOMI.
GOJI REMINDED THE EMPEROR THAT HE HAD SERVED HIM LOYALLY AND HAD REIGNED MAGNANIMOUSLY OVER HIS KINGDOM AND OVER HIS PEOPLE FOR ALMOST FIFTY YEARS.
WAS THIS HOW THE GODS REPAID VIRTUOUS MEN, HE ASKED? THE KING'S IMPASSIONED WORDS SHOT DIRECTLY TO THE EMPEROR'S HEART
THEY BUILT AN ALTAR TO HOUSE IT AND ENLISTED THE TAKEDO FAMILY TO GUARD IT
THEN HE SOLEMNLY WARNED GOJI THAT HE SHOULD THINK CAREFULLY, FOR THERE WAS A PRICE TO PAY
BUT THE KING HAD MADE UP HIS MIND. HE BROUGHT TOGETHER THE GREATEST CRAFTSMEN OF THE LAND ONCE THE MASK WAS READY, HE WENT TO GHOSHUO TEMPLE AND PUT IT ON.
THE GOLDEN MASK, NOW KNOWN AS THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS, HAS REMAINED HIDDEN ON THAT ISLAND EVER SINCE
MANY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO GET THEIR HANDS ON ONE OF THE THREE SACRED TREASURES OF THE EMPIRE BUT...
...ALL HAVE DIED TRYING
WHERE HE WENT NEXT, WHAT HE WENT THROUGH, AND WHAT HE DID... NOBODY KNOWS.
BUT WHEN HE CAME BACK FROM THE TEMPLE, ZIJI WAS AT HIS SIDE
THE RETURN WAS CELEBRATED THROUGHOUT THE KINGDOM. GOJI'S SUBJECTS, WHO HAD BEEN TERRIFIED BY HIS FURY, BROKE OUT IN JOY

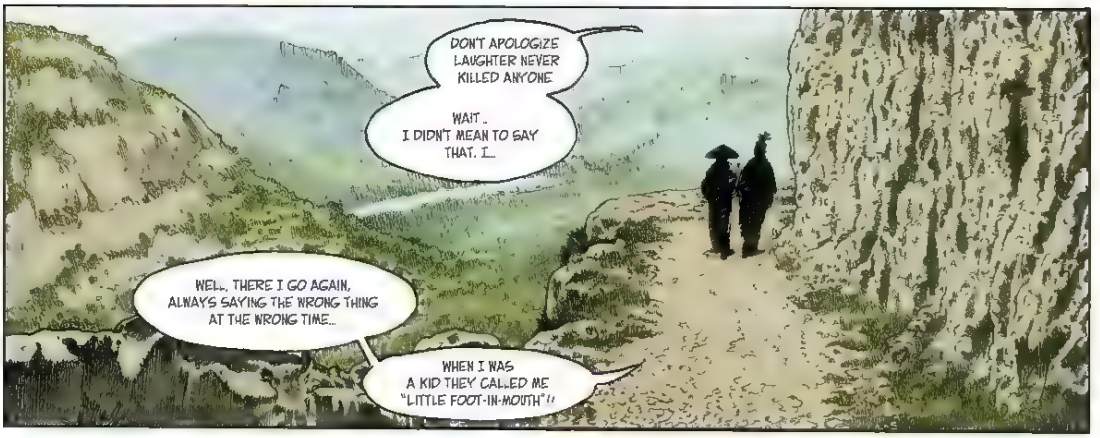

THAT'S THE TALE OF THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS.
I SEE... HE'LL OF AN EGOTIST, THAT KING GO!
WHAT?!
WELL, SURE HE WEEPS FOR HIS DAUGHTER BECAUSE HE'S THINKING OF THE RELIEF SHE GAVE HIM. HE GETS FURIOUS FOR THE SAME REASON, AND THEN HE WEEPS AGAIN BECAUSE HE'S GOING TO SUFFER
BUT AT NO POINT DO WE HEAR ABOUT HER, ABOUT WHAT SHE FEELS, ABOUT HER PAIN OR THAT OF HIS PEOPLE
IT'S A SELFISH LOVE
LOVE IS SELFISH BY NATURE.
I... I MADE AN OATH...
I SWORE THAT NOT EVEN DEATH WOULD KEEP US APART
ALL LOVERS SAY THAT. THAT'S WHAT THEY--
NOT ME!! I WOULDN'T SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT IF I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT TO THE VERY CORE OF MY BEING.
YES, WELL... I CAN SEE THAT
NOT ALWAYS
NOT ALWAYS
STOP ACTING LIKE YOU KNOW ME... LIKE YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL DEEP INSIDE!!
YOU'RE JUST LIKE THE VILLAGERS AND MY PARENTS... ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY UNDERSTAND BUT KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE HEART OF A YOUNG, INNOCENT GIRL!
THEY HAVE NEVER LOVED THE WAY I LOVE AND THEY NEVER WILL!! THEY COULDN'T EVEN BEGIN TO FATHOM HOW MUCH!
THINKING ABOUT HIM?
HIM?
YOUR FIANCÉ... KOBURO
YES
CONSTANTLY
TO MADNESS!! TO DEATH!!
DEATH? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT DEATH?!
NOW YOU'RE THE ONE TALKING ABOUT THINGS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.
I'M TIRED
THANKS. GOOD NIGHT TO YOU, TOO







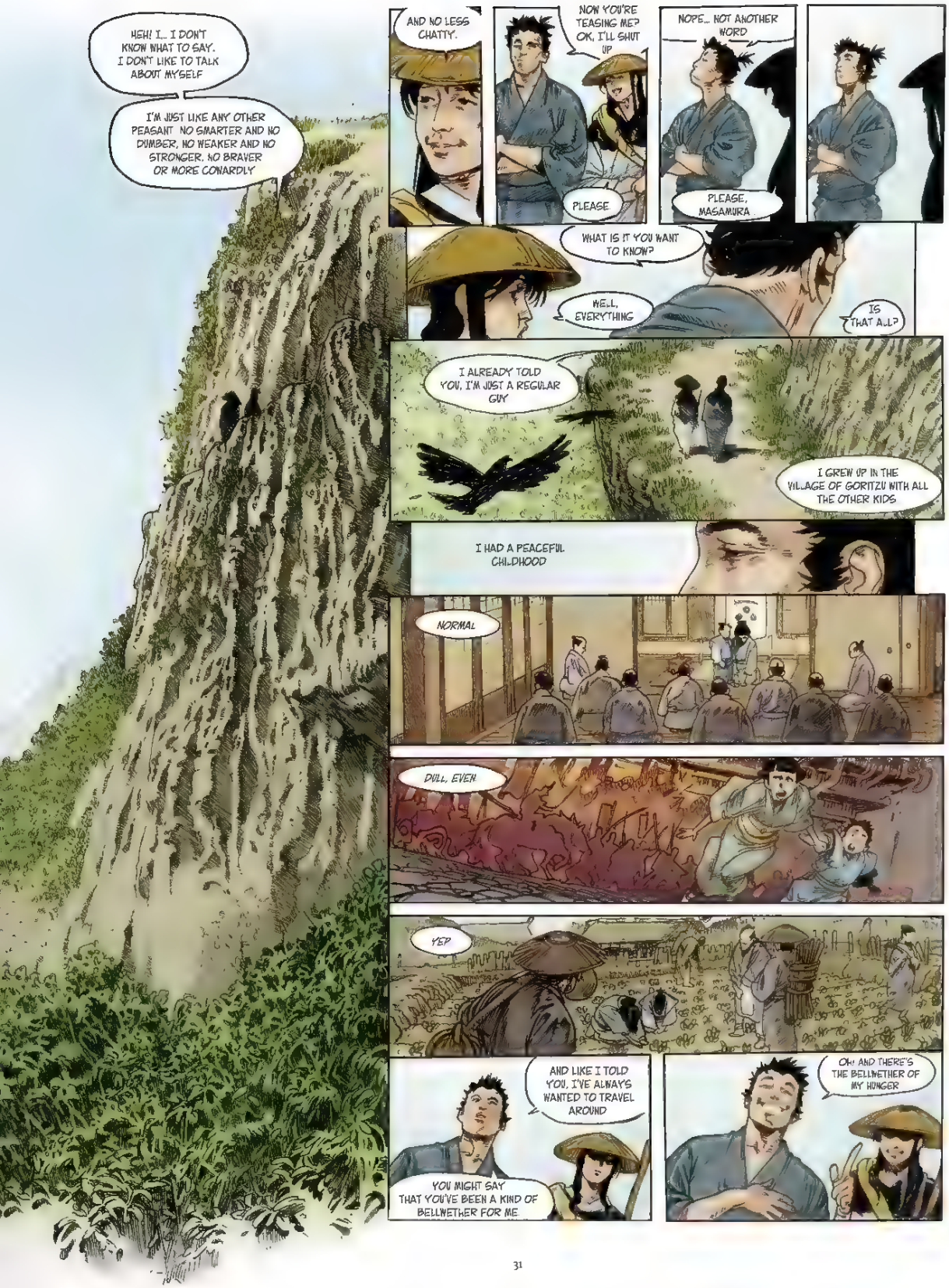
YOU LAUGHED.
SORRY

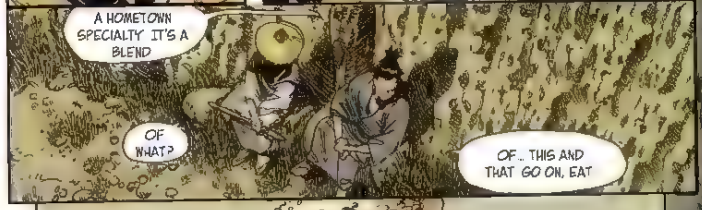

DON'T APOLOGIZE LAUGHTER NEVER KILLED ANYONE
WAIT.. I DIDN'T MEAN TO SAY THAT. I...
WELL, THERE I GO AGAIN, ALWAYS SAYING THE WRONG THING AT THE WRONG TIME...
WHEN I WAS A KID THEY CALLED ME "LITTLE FOOT-IN-MOUTH"!!

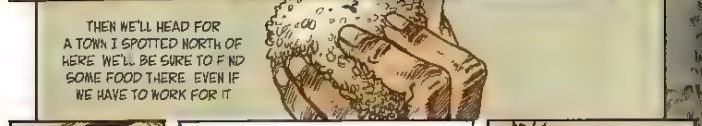
BOY OH BOY! BUT WHAT ELSE CAN YOU EXPECT FROM A PENNILESS, IGNORANT, PIGHEADED PEASANT WHO'S NEVER VENTURED FURTHER THAN THE HILLS SURROUNDING HIS VILLAGE

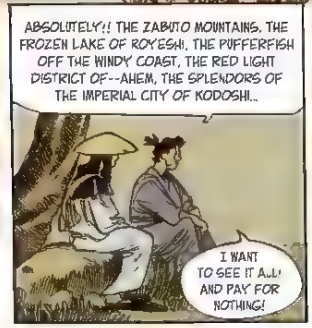
YOU DON'T SEEM IGNORANT. MUCH LESS PIGHEADED
OH?
NO TO BE HONEST, YOU DON'T EVEN SEEM LIKE A PEASANT

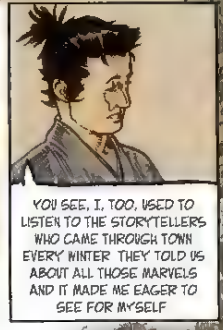
TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF YOU ASK QUESTIONS ALL THE TIME, BUT I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT.. MASAMURA.


HEH! I... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I DON'T LIKE TO TALK ABOUT MYSELF
I'M JUST LIKE ANY OTHER PEASANT NO SMARTER AND NO DUMBER, NO WEAKER AND NO STRONGER. NO BRAVER OR MORE COWARDLY
AND NO LESS CHATTY.
NOW YOU'RE TEASING ME? OK, I'LL SHUT UP
PLEASE
NOPE... NOT ANOTHER WORD
PLEASE, MASAMURA
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT TO KNOW?
WELL, EVERYTHING
IS THAT ALL?
I ALREADY TOLD YOU, I'M JUST A REGULAR GUY
I GREW UP IN THE VILLAGE OF GORITZU WITH ALL THE OTHER KIDS
I HAD A PEACEFUL CHILDHOOD
NORMAL
DULL, EVEN
YEP
AND LIKE I TOLD YOU, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRAVEL AROUND
YOU MIGHT SAY THAT YOU'VE BEEN A KIND OF BELLWETHER FOR ME
OH! AND THERE'S THE BELLWETHER OF MY HUNGER









I WOULD CONSTANTLY TELL MY FRIENDS HOW I WANTED TO GO SEE THIS, VISIT THAT. AND ALL THEY WOULD SAY WAS THAT IT WAS FAR AWAY AND DANGEROUS.

EVEN AT THAT AGE, THEY WERE LIKE THEIR PARENTS, STEEPED IN FEAR

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN. FEAR OF OTHERS, FEAR OF EVERYTHING BEYOND THE HILLS SURROUNDING THEIR TOWN. OF ANYTHING DIFFERENT THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PEASANT

IT'S THE COMMON FOUNDATION UPON WHICH THEY DEFINE THEMSELVES AND LIVE THEIR LIVES, AND HOW COULD IT BE OTHERWISE? THE VERY DIFFICULTY OF THEIR CRUEL, BITTER LIVES ENSURES THAT THEY COULD NEVER SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY

THEY'RE PROFESSIONAL VICTIMS
VICTIMS OF WARLORDS, VICTIMS OF THE VAGARIES OF SEASONS AND HARVESTS, VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN IGNORANCE AND ISOLATION.

AHEM. I... I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M TELLING YOU ALL THIS
IT DOESN'T MATTER. I...
MASAMURA.

I...
...I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAY THIS WITHOUT HURTING YOU BUT...

I LIKE YOU VERY MUCH.
YOU HAVE HELPED ME... PROTECTED ME. YOU ARE FUNNY, KIND, AND COMFORTING.

BUT...?

I... I'M NO IDIOT I'VE NOTICED THE WAY YOU LOOK AT ME
YES, WITH MY EYES. THE NERVE!
STOP IT

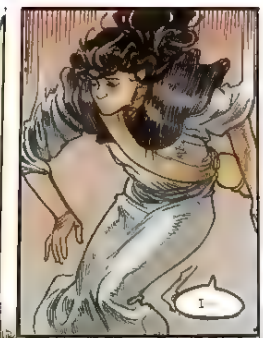
I'M SORRY, BUT I'M UNDER THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT YOU'RE
THAT I'M...?
YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY

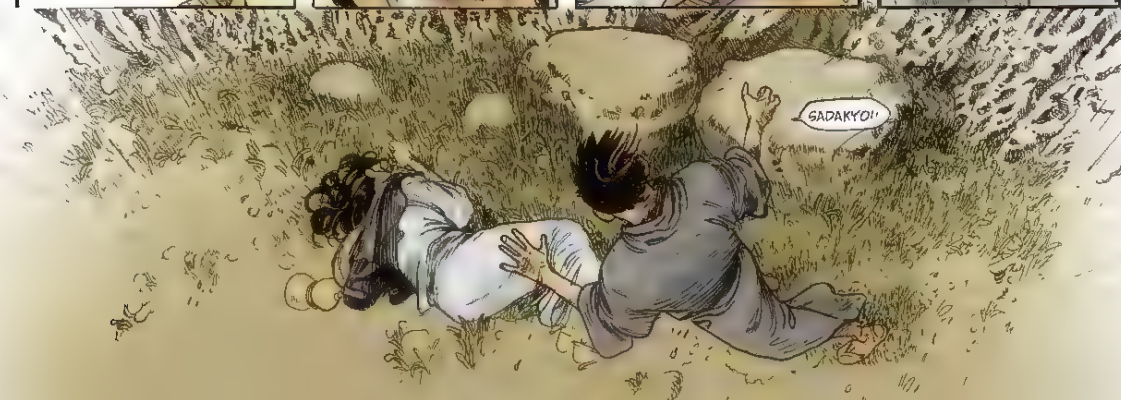
AND WHAT ABOUT IT?

IT'S NOT POSSIBLE!! I FORBID YOU!
I FORBID YOU FROM EVEN THINKING ABOUT IT!! I FORBID IT. DO YOU HEAR ME?

I DON'T LOVE YOU!! AND I WILL NEVER LOVE YOU BECAUSE I WILL NEVER LOVE ANYONE EXCEPT FOR KOBURO. DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?!

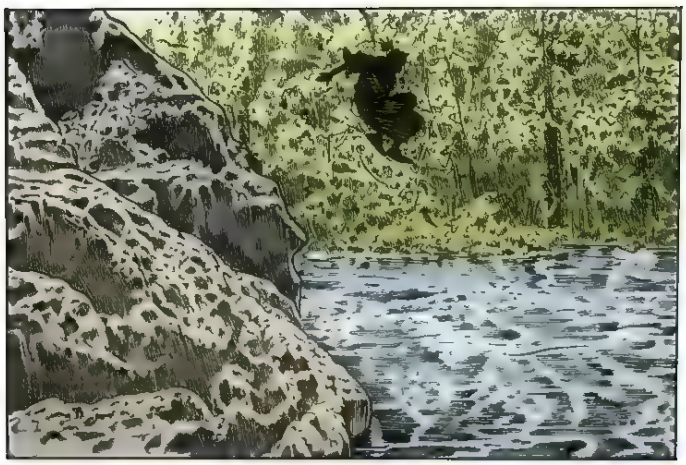
NOW, GO!! LEAVE ME ALONE!! I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN...

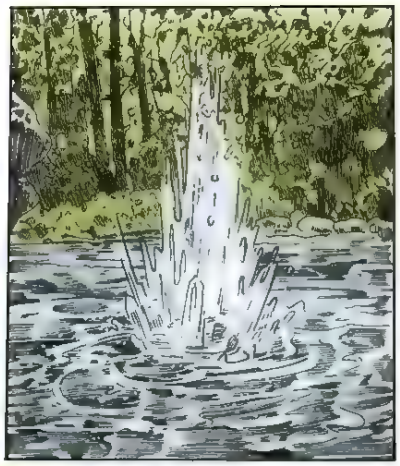

I...


GADAKYO!!

SADAKYO..
SADAKYO, WAKE UP
WHAT HAPPENED?
YOU PASSED OUT
YOU'RE TIRED AND HUNGRY AND YOU HAVE A FEVER
HERE, EAT THIS RICE STAY HERE WHILE I GO MAKE US SOME SOUP
WHA?
THIS WAY, BOYS!!
QUICK!
THERE! LOOK!!

FASTER!!
AH!!
SADAKYO!!
YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO RUN. I'LL HIDE YOU AND DRAW THEM AWAY
DON'T MOVE OR MAKE ANY NOISE, NO MATTER WHAT
YOU DUMB MUTT
I'M GONNA
...KILL YOU!!
CRACK!!





SONZUMO!
BOY, OUR THIEF REALLY DID A NUMBER ON HIM!!

THAT BASTARD! TWO GOLD COINS TO WHOEVER GETS THEIR HANDS ON HIM!
DON'T WORRY, WE'LL GET 'IM!!

I'LL MAKE HIM WISH HE'D NEVER BEEN BORN!

HEY, YOU THERE!!
DON'T MOVE!!
I SAID "DON'T MOVE"!!
Y-YOUR GOOSE IS COOKED, FELLA!!!
HEY!! GUYS!! OVER HERE!!
OVER--OW!!
RAAAW!!
AAAH!!
UNH...

ANF!
ANF!
GGGGGGNNNNN...
GGGGNNNN...
GGGGGGGNNN
RRRRR...
...
RRRF...
RRRFFF...
BLLLRG!
?!

WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR HIDING PLACE?
I DON'T KNOW

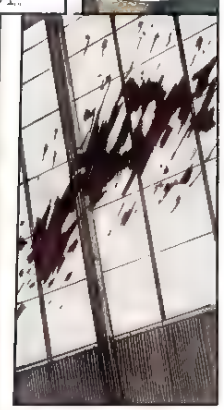
WHEN THE FARMERS LEFT, I WAS ALL ALONE. I COULDN'T HEAR ANYTHING, NOT A SOUL.
THE SILENCE SPOOKED ME

IT WASN'T VERY SMART OF YOU. SILENCE HAS NEVER KILLED ANYONE, FAR AS I KNOW...
WHEREAS YOU--

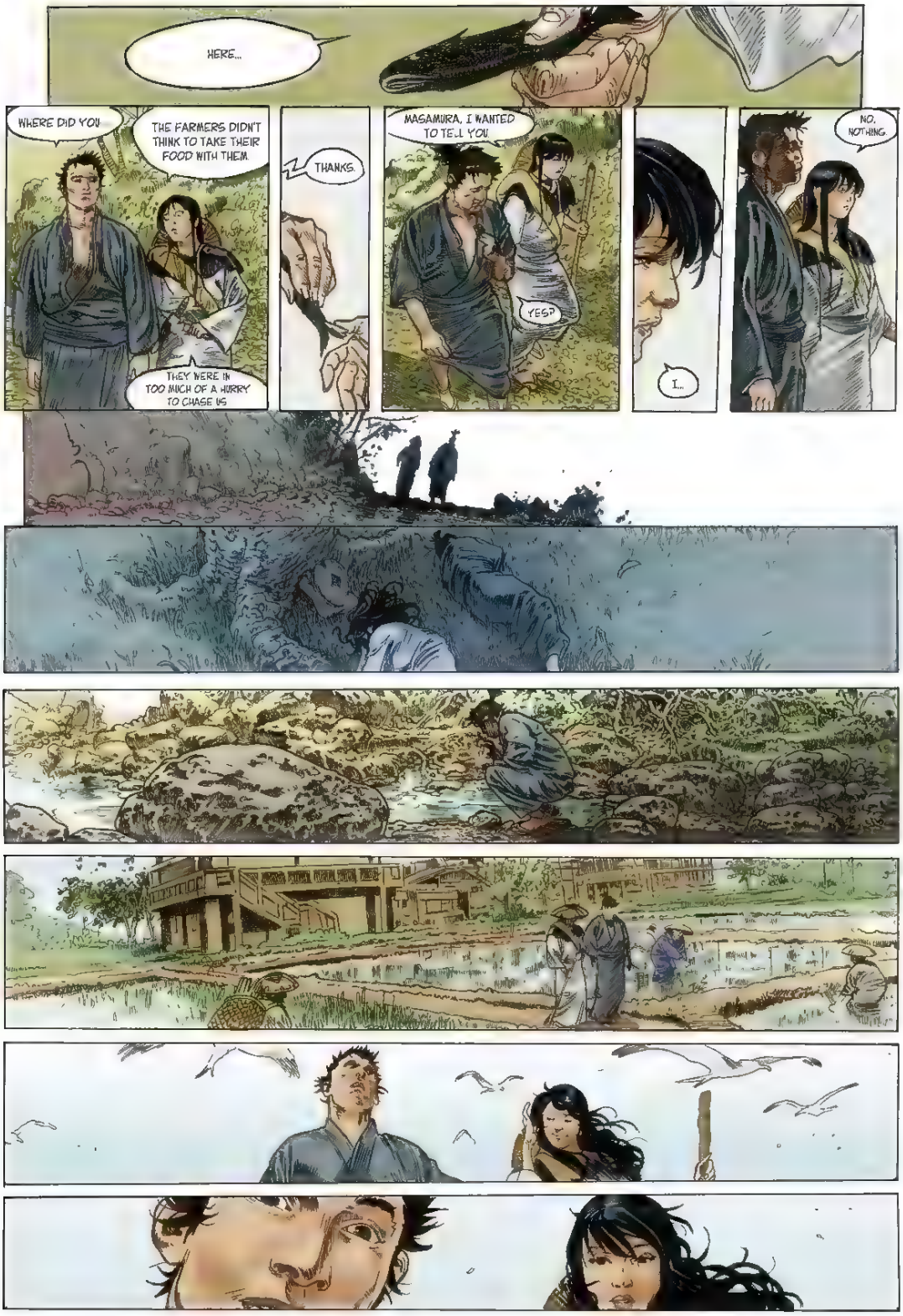
SORRY!! I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T MEAN TO SAY THAT

IT'S ALL MY FAULT!!
IF YOU HADN'T FOLLOWED ME, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!! BECAUSE OF ME, YOU'VE KILLED A MAN AND I...

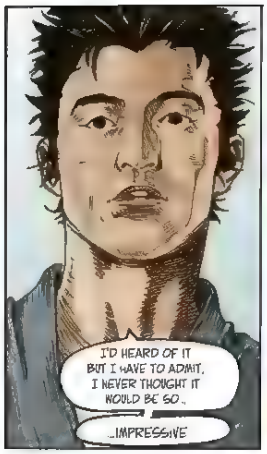
NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I'M AFRAID.



LET'S GET MOVING!! THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHO'S GUILTY OF WHAT ONCE WE'VE FINISHED YOUR MISSION.

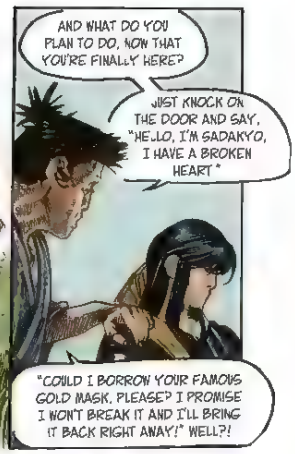

HERE...
WHERE DID YOU
THE FARMERS DIDN'T THINK TO TAKE THEIR FOOD WITH THEM.
THEY WERE IN TOO MUCH OF A HURRY TO CHASE US
THANKS.
MASAMURA, I WANTED TO TELL YOU
YES?
I...
NO, NOTHING.

YOU SAID IT ..


I'D HEARD OF IT BUT I HAVE TO ADMIT, I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SO..
...IMPRESSIVE

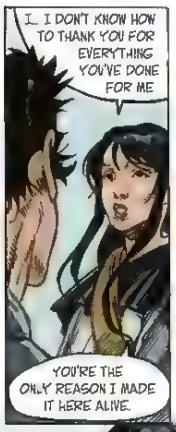
HEY!! WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO?!

DID SEEING TAKEDO CASTLE LIGHT A FIRE UNDER YOU?

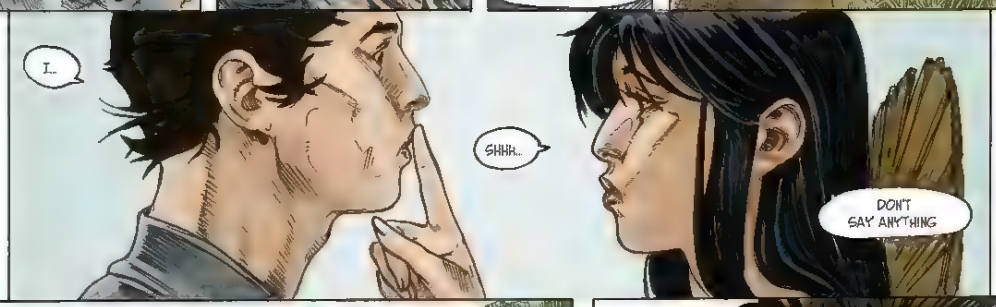

AND WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO, NOW THAT YOU'RE FINALLY HERE?
JUST KNOCK ON THE DOOR AND SAY, "HELLO, I'M SADAKYO, I HAVE A BROKEN HEART"
"COULD I BORROW YOUR FAMOUS GOLD MASK, PLEASE? I PROMISE I WON'T BREAK IT AND I'LL BRING IT BACK RIGHT AWAY!" WELL?!

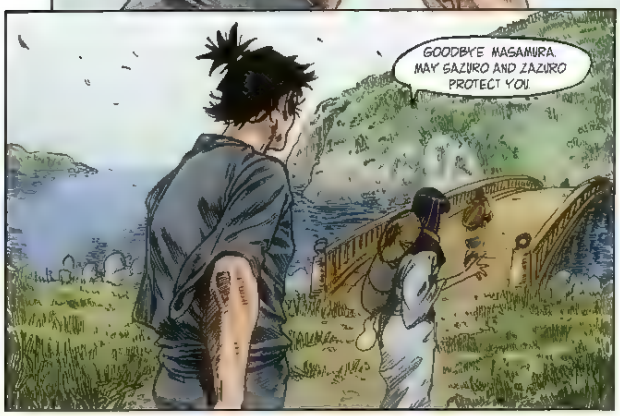
WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO YOU?

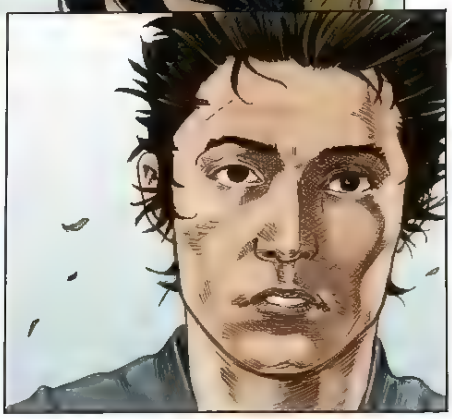
THIS IS WHERE WE PART WAYS

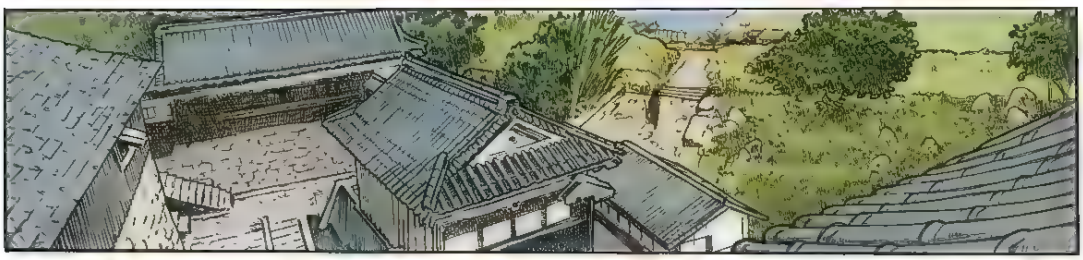

I... I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE FOR ME
YOU'RE THE ONLY REASON I MADE IT HERE ALIVE.

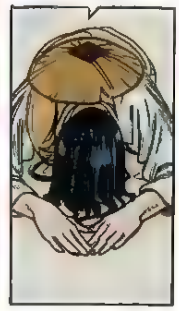
ONCE THIS IS ALL OVER, I HOPE TO BE ABLE PAY YOU BACK SOMEHOW.. FOR EVERYTHING I OWE YOU
BUT FOR NOW, I NEED TO GO ON ALONE


I...
SHHH...
DON'T SAY ANYTHING

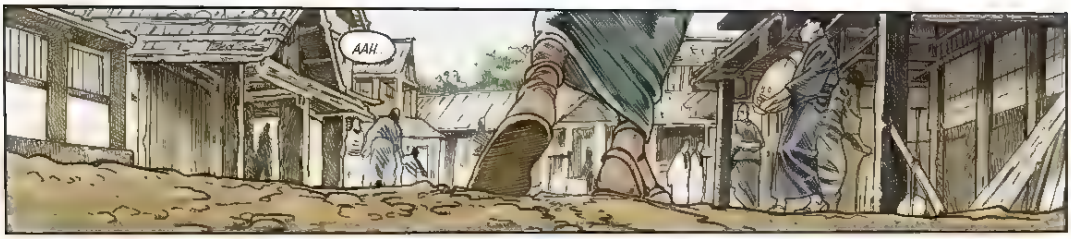

GOODBYE MASAMURA. MAY GAZURO AND ZAZURO PROTECT YOU.







YOU REALLY THINK YOU CAN SHOW UP JUST LIKE THAT AND EXPECT THE TAKEDOS TO OPEN THEIR DOORS TO YOU?!


AAH!

AAH.

AAAAHH!!

AAAAAUUU!!!

RRRAAAAAAR!!

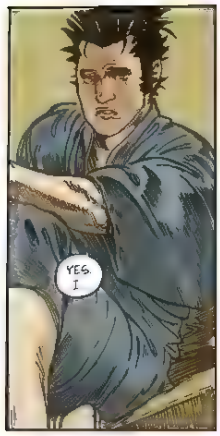
STOP IT!!

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET WHAT YOU WANT BY MAKING A SCENE LIKE THIS, BELIEVE ME!!

WILL YOU STOP?!
RRRAAAAAH H!!!!

COME ON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE

EAT
GO ON, EAT!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET YOURSELF HIRED BY THE TAKEDOS IF YOU DIE OF HUNGER.
I MEAN, WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? THAT THEY'D OPEN THE CASTLE GATES JUST LIKE THAT? JUST BECAUSE YOU ASKED?
WHY NOT?
WHY NOT? YOU CLEARLY KNOW NOTHING ABOUT CASTLES AND THE CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THEM!!
AND HOW DO YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT THEM?
I...
WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
NOTHING. JUST THE FIRST TIME I SAW YOU
BACK IN MIZUSHIRO, ON THE BATTLEFIELD...
EXCUSE ME I'M SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT WERE YOU...
WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT MIZUSHIRO?!


YES. I

THE BATTLE OF MIZUSHIRO?!

YES, WELL, NOT--
HOW 'BOUT THAT? I KNEW THIS DAY'D COME I KNEW IT!!

YER THE FIRST MAN I'VE MET WHO SURVIVED THAT BLOODBATH.
YOU WERE THERE?

AYE!! I EVEN GOT A SOUVENIR!

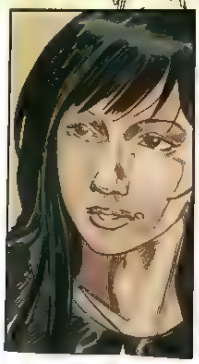
LISTEN, THE TRUTH IS I JUST...
THIS CALLS FOR A DRINK!!

COME ON, MY TREAT!!

SO, YOU WERE AT MIZUSHIRO, EH?! WERE YOU WITH THE LANCERS?! OR THE BLACK BEAR SQUADRON? I HEARD THEY WERE NEARLY WIPED OUT THAT DAY. THEY SAY ONLY ONE IN TEN SURVIVED.
I...
DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT?!
I GET IT, BELIEVE YOU ME. WHY IF I HAD A WAY TO WIPE THAT AWFUL CARNAGE FROM MY MEMORY...

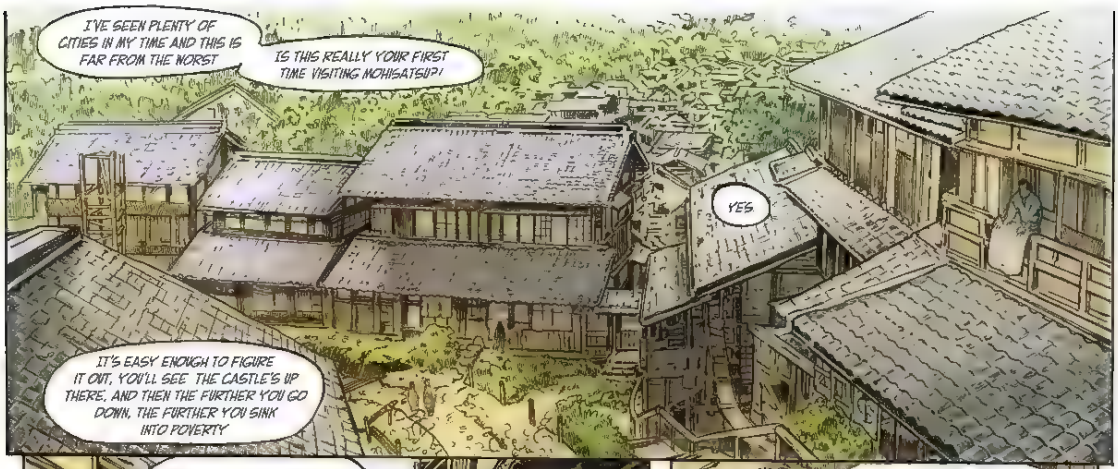
SO, WHAT ARE YOU DOIN' AROUND HERE, IF YOU DON'T MIND ME ASKIN'? I HEARD YOU TALKIN' ABOUT TAKEDO CASTLE.
I...
SERIOUSLY?!

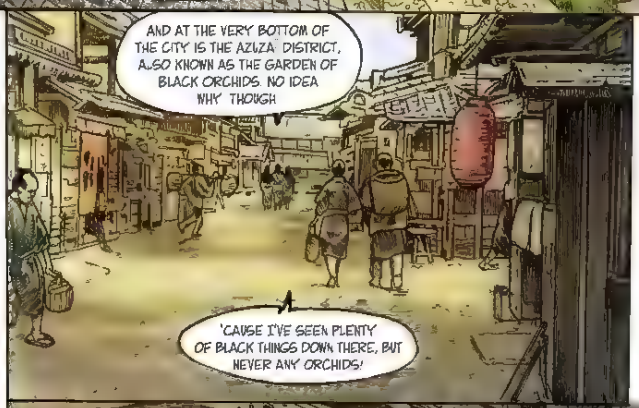
SHE'S PRETTY, AND THAT'S A GOOD START, BUT IT WON'T BE ENOUGH.

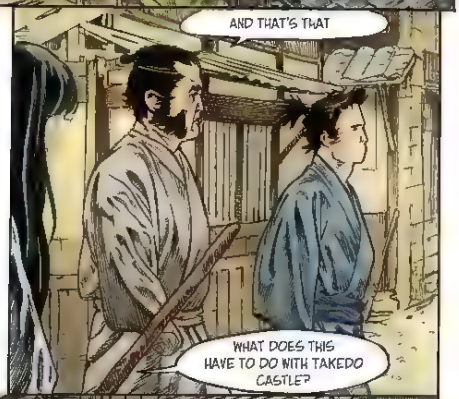

CAN YOU GET ME INTO THE CASTLE? I'D DO ANYTHING!!

WHOA, SETTLE DOWN! I'M JUST A POOR, DISABLED VETERAN WITH AN EMPTY PURSE. I'M NOT THE ONE WHO CAN GET YOU INTO THE CASTLE.

BUT I KNOW WHO YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO...

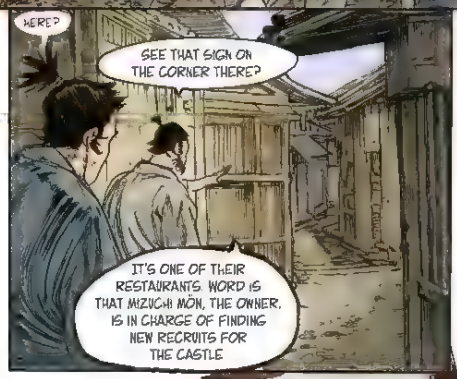

I'VE SEEN PLENTY OF CITIES IN MY TIME AND THIS IS FAR FROM THE WORST
IS THIS REALLY YOUR FIRST TIME VISITING MOHISATSU?!
YES
IT'S EASY ENOUGH TO FIGURE IT OUT. YOU'LL SEE THE CASTLE'S UP THERE, AND THEN THE FURTHER YOU GO DOWN, THE FURTHER YOU SINK INTO POVERTY


AND AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE CITY IS THE AZUZA DISTRICT, ALSO KNOWN AS THE GARDEN OF BLACK ORCHIDS. NO IDEA WHY THOUGH
'CAUSE I'VE SEEN PLENTY OF BLACK THINGS DOWN THERE, BUT NEVER ANY ORCHIDS!

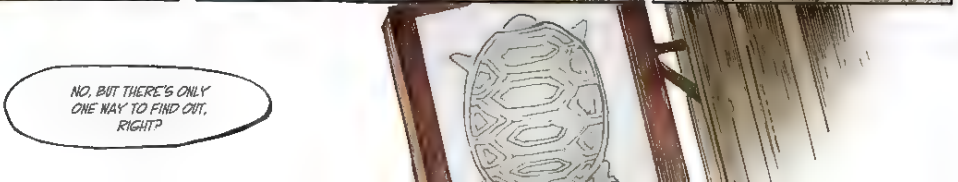

AND THAT'S THAT
WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH TAKEDO CASTLE?

EXCEPT THAT AZUZAI CONTAINS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE SECT OF THE NINTH STEP, RUN BY THE MÖN FAMILY
NOTHING

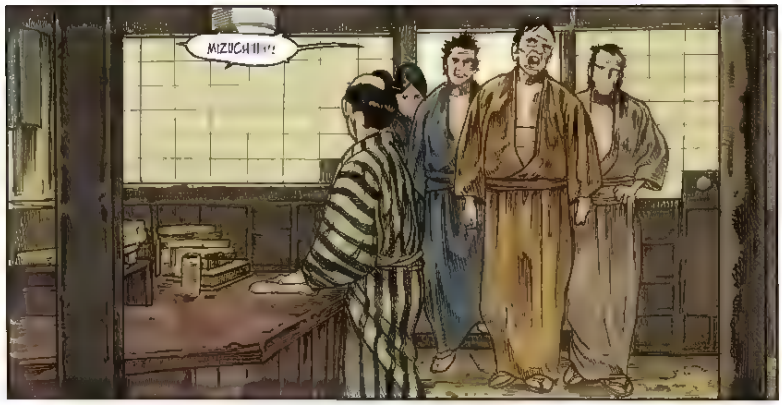
AND WHILE THE TAKEDOS RULE THE TOP OF THE CITY
..DOWN HERE, IT'S THE MÖN WHO RUN THINGS.


HERE?
SEE THAT SIGN ON THE CORNER THERE?
IT'S ONE OF THEIR RESTAURANTS. WORD IS THAT MIZUCHI MÖN, THE OWNER, IS IN CHARGE OF FINDING NEW RECRUITS FOR THE CASTLE

ARE YOU SURE?


NO, BUT THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT, RIGHT?

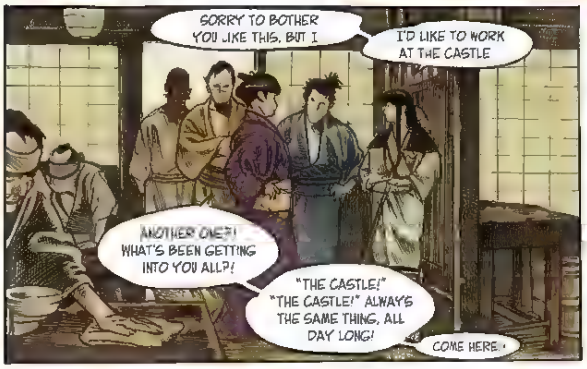
MIZUCHI!!!


MIZUCHI!!!

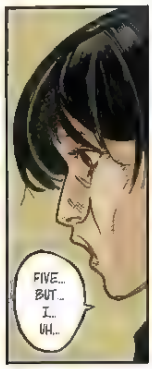
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT, YOU NO GOOD SON OF A BITCH?!

NOT ME. THEM.

WHAT?
MAKE IT QUICK THE GREAT MIZUCHI HAS NO TIME TO WASTE!!


SORRY TO BOTHER YOU LIKE THIS, BUT I
I'D LIKE TO WORK AT THE CASTLE
ANOTHER ONE?! WHAT'S BEEN GETTING INTO YOU ALL?!
"THE CASTLE!" "THE CASTLE!" ALWAYS THE SAME THING, ALL DAY LONG!
COME HERE!

HMM... NICE TEETH, SMOOTH, SILKY HAIR, SMALL WRISTS, NO BEAUTY MARKS... SHE MIGHT JUST PULL IT OFF...
DID SHE BRING THE FIVE THOUSAND ZIY'S?


FIVE... BUT... I... UH...

SHE'S GOT NO MONEY?
THEN WHO THE HELL SENT A WHORE LIKE THIS MY WAY?!

HA HA HA.
HA HA HA!!

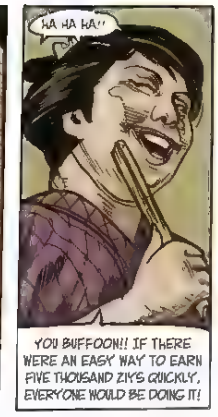
GET OUTTA HERE, YOU SILLY GOOSE!! SCRAM!! GO BACK TO YOUR LOUSY VILLAGE!
MIZUCHI DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE ON HELPLESS FOOLS LIKE YOU!!
BUT...

YOU HEARD THE LADY! GET OUTTA HERE!

WAIT!!

NOW WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO TO EARN THAT MUCH MONEY?

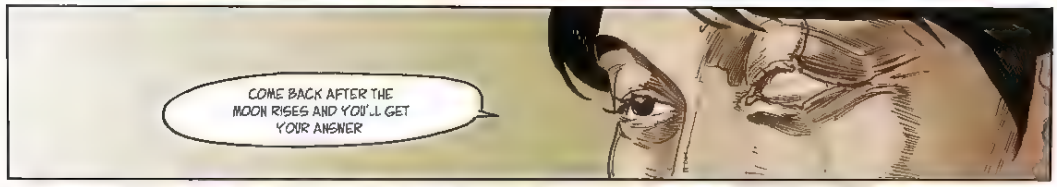

HA HA HA!!
YOU BUFFOON!! IF THERE WERE AN EASY WAY TO EARN FIVE THOUSAND ZIYS QUICKLY, EVERYONE WOULD BE DOING IT!

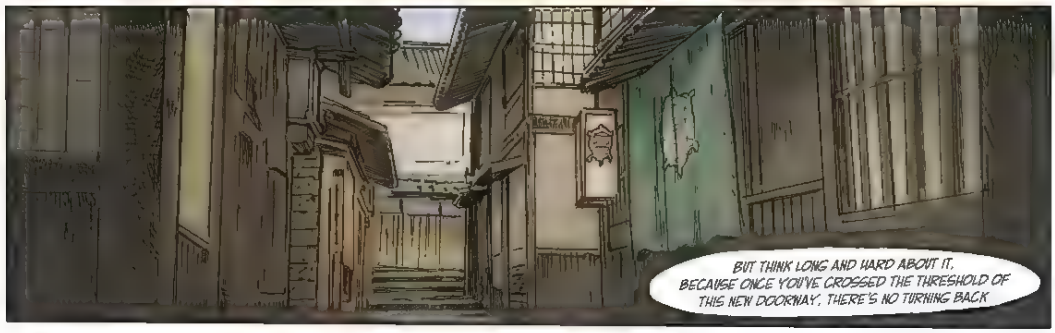
I NEVER SAID IT HAD TO BE AN EASY WAY.

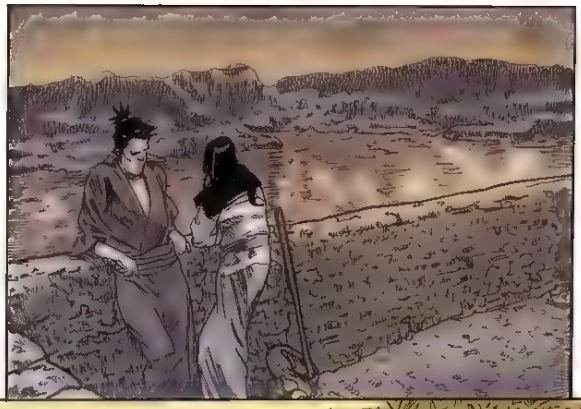
THERE MUST BE WAYS TO EARN MONEY.. FOR THINGS NOT EVERYONE IS WILLING TO DO

THAT MAY BE... BUT THEN AGAIN, IF NOT EVERYONE IS WILLING TO DO IT, THERE'S LIKELY A GOOD REASON
WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?

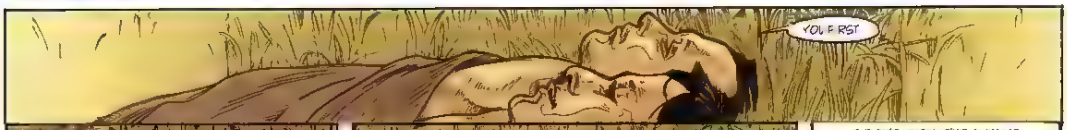
WHAT'S WORTH FIVE THOUSAND ZIYS?


COME BACK AFTER THE MOON RISES AND YOU'LL GET YOUR ANSWER


BUT THINK LONG AND HARD ABOUT IT. BECAUSE ONCE YOU'VE CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF THIS NEW DOORWAY, THERE'S NO TURNING BACK



WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?


YOU, FIRST.

COME ON.
NO. YOU.
PLEASE.

I WAS THINKING ABOUT KIDS... I WANT FIVE.
FIVE? WHY'S THAT?

I DON'T KNOW. I'VE ALWAYS WANTED FIVE CHILDREN.
THERE'S NO REASON. IT'S JUST HOW IT IS. LIKE LOVE.

YOU LOVE ME?

YOU NEED TO LOVE ME LIKE I LOVE YOU, KOBURO!

OTHERWISE I'LL DIE!

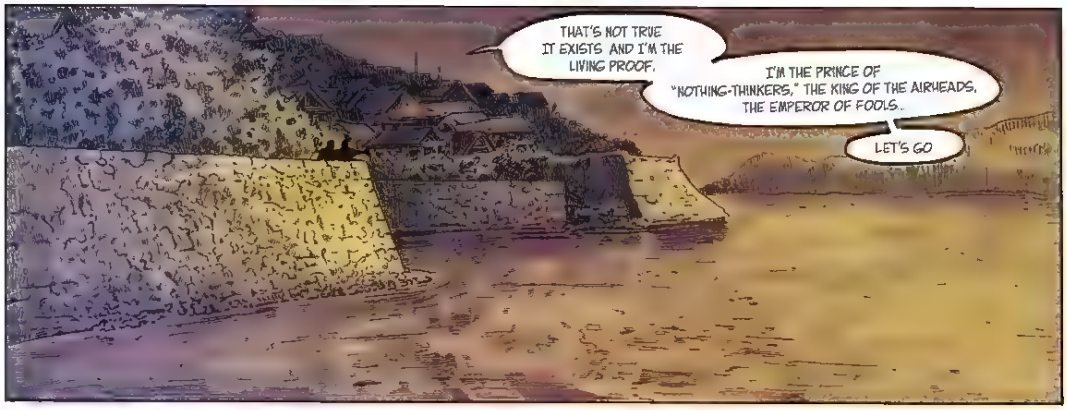
MASAMURA...
MAMA, DON'T TRY TO TALK...
MASAMURA LISTEN TO ME
I DON'T WANT TO DIE WITHOUT TELLING YOU SOMETHING IMPORTANT FIRST
DON'T SAY THINGS LIKE THAT, MAMA IT'S BAD LUCK
MASAMURA, I WANT YOU TO PROMISE ME SOMETHING
STOP TALKING SAVE YOUR STRENGTH
PROMISE ME... PROMISE ME YOU'LL FORGIVE YOUR FATHER
I'LL BE JOINING HIM SOON AND I WANT TO TELL HIM THAT HIS SON FORGIVES HIM.
I WANT TO TELL HIM THAT WE FORGIVE HIM FOR EVERYTHING WE'VE BEEN THROUGH... FOR ENDING UP HERE, IN THIS MISERABLE VILLAGE, FAR FROM HOME, ALONE, ABANDONED
MAMA I DON'T
PROMISE ME!
PROMISE!!
AAAAAAHHH...

MASAMURA.

YES?

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
NOTHING.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS THINKING OF NOTHING.


THAT'S NOT TRUE IT EXISTS AND I'M THE LIVING PROOF.
I'M THE PRINCE OF "NOTHING-THINKERS," THE KING OF THE AIRHEADS, THE EMPEROR OF FOOLS..
LET'S GO

MASAMURA?

I DON'T WANT YOU TO SACRIFICE YOURSELF FOR ME

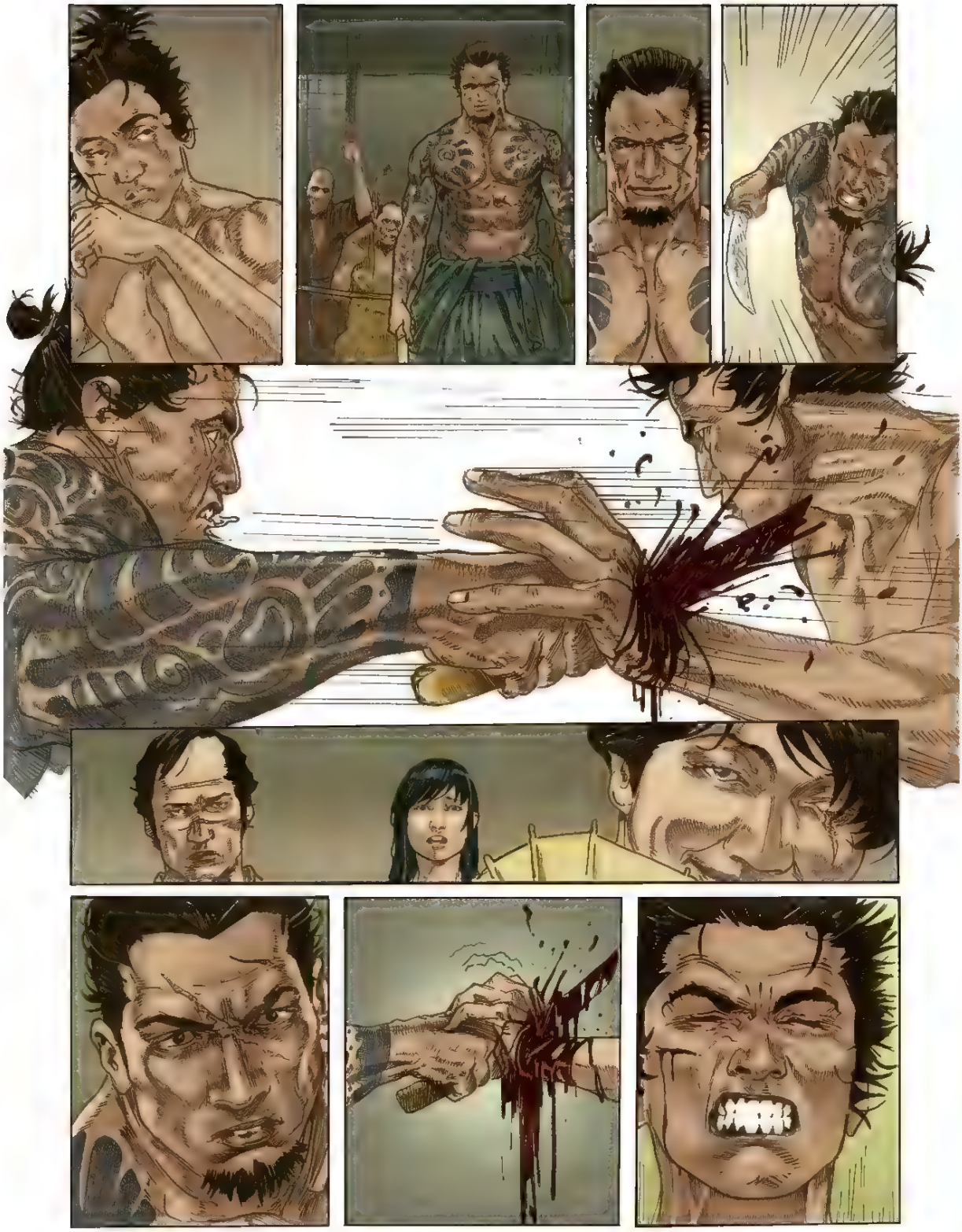
FOR YOU?

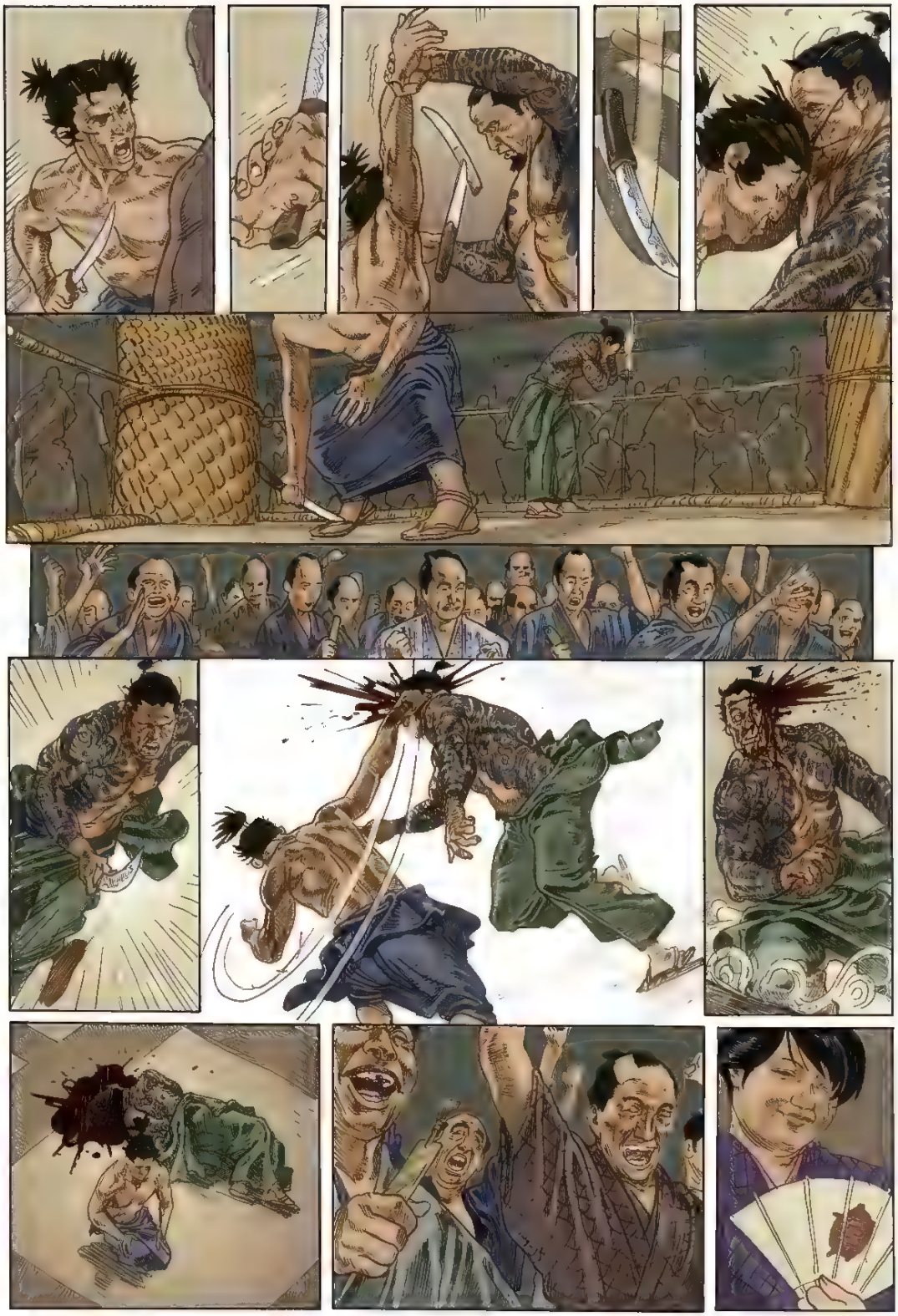
FOR YOU?

NOTHING I'VE DONE HAS EVER BEEN FOR YOU, PRINCESS.. NOTHING AT ALL

DROP THE TOUGH GUY ACT, HONEY THE GREAT MIZUCHI HAS SEEN PLENTY THAT MAKE A STRONGER IMPRESSION THAN YOU DO
THIS WAY...
RUB THIS ON YOUR CHEST
TAKE OFF YOUR TOP
TESHINOBO...
HERE...
HURRY UP IT'S...
SHOWTIME

TOO LATE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND NOW
SO EITHER FIGHT...
...OR DIE

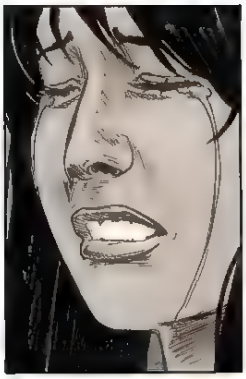




WE ALL HAVE HIDDEN TALENTS.
MINE IS DETECTING THE HIDDEN TALENTS OF OTHERS.
YOU HAVE A WARRIOR IN YOU... A KILLER.
I SAW IT STRAIGHT AWAY.
THIS WAS A REBIRTH AND LIKE ANY BIRTH, IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT... AND PAINFUL.
TLANG! TLANG!
HERE'S YOUR TAKE FROM TONIGHT'S BETTING. FIVE HUNDRED ZIYS.
TESHINOBO WILL GET YOU CLEANED UP AND THEN HE'LL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOM.
TONIGHT IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE FOR YOU, MY BOY.
HE'S ALL YOURS MY DEAR.

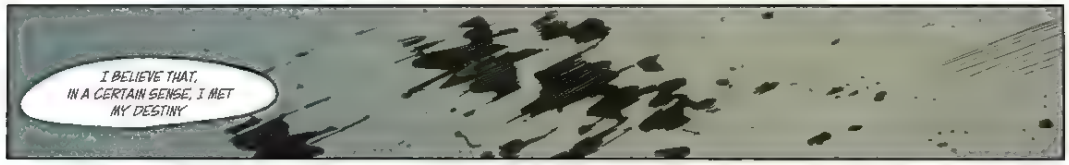
OK, I'M DONE

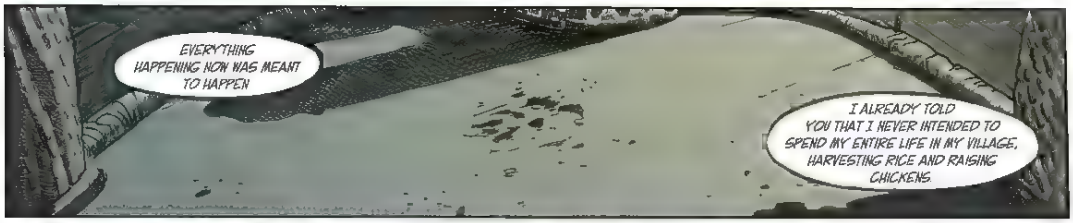
YOU NEED TO REST FOR A FEW DAYS. BUT COME THE NEXT FULL MOON, YOU'LL BE HOPPING AROUND LIKE A MOUNTAIN GOAT

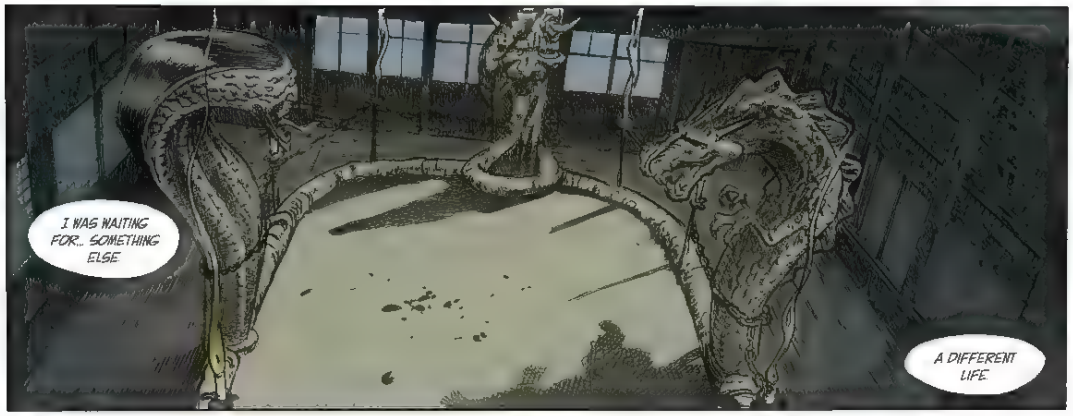


YOU KNOW... WHEN THE GUY FELL AND THE CROWD STARTED GOING WILD, I... I UNDERSTOOD SOMETHING.

WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS WAS PREORDAINED TO HAPPEN. THE DAY THAT I MET YOU ON THE BATTLEFIELD IN MIZUSHIRO, I DIDN'T JUST MEET A PERSON.


I BELIEVE THAT, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, I MET MY DESTINY

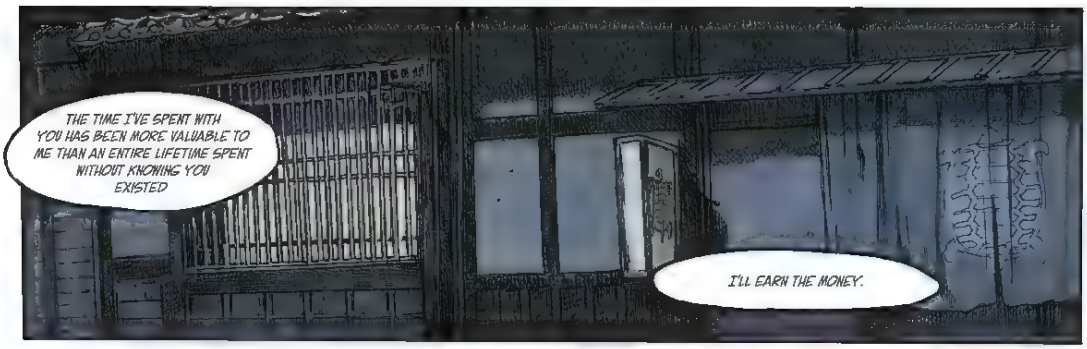

EVERYTHING HAPPENING NOW WAS MEANT TO HAPPEN
I ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT I NEVER INTENDED TO SPEND MY ENTIRE LIFE IN MY VILLAGE, HARVESTING RICE AND RAISING CHICKENS.

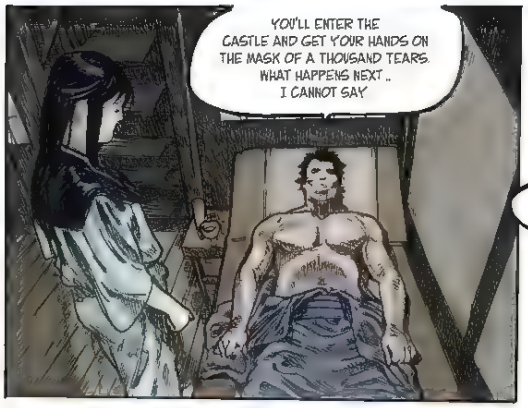

I WAS WAITING FOR... SOMETHING ELSE
A DIFFERENT LIFE

A DIFFERENT LIFE? MIGHT AS WELL SAY "A DIFFERENT DEATH."

FACE THE FACTS: HOW MANY OF THOSE FIGHTS DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE YOU CAN SURVIVE? ONE? FIVE? TEN?
NO ONE WHO GOES TO FIGHT IN THAT ARENA LIVES LONG ENOUGH TO GET ANY USE FROM THE MONEY THEY MAKE

SO WHAT?
I'LL HAVE LIVED MY LIFE AS I MEANT TO AND I'LL HAVE HAD WHAT FEW HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HAVE.


THE TIME I'VE SPENT WITH YOU HAS BEEN MORE VALUABLE TO ME THAN AN ENTIRE LIFETIME SPENT WITHOUT KNOWING YOU EXISTED
I'LL EARN THE MONEY.


YOU'LL ENTER THE CASTLE AND GET YOUR HANDS ON THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT .. I CANNOT SAY

EXCEPT FOR THIS. I'M GOING TO LIVE AND I'M GOING TO WAIT FOR YOU
HOWEVER LONG IT TAKES, I'LL BE WAITING.

MASAMURA..

YOU'LL BE BACK I KNOW IT

AND I'LL BE HERE.

I'LL BE HERE

THREE THOUSAND... FOUR... AND FIVE.

FIVE THOUSAND ZIY'S.
NOW THAT WE'RE HERE, I CAN TELL YOU THE TRUTH: I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D MANAGE TO EARN THIS MONEY.

BUT HERE IT IS... AND HERE YOU ARE, MY PROUD, HANDSOME WARRIOR.

MY FAVORITE KILLER...

THE MONEY IS YOURS.
YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED YOUR MIND?

AS YOU WISH.

GET GOING, MY LOVELY. THE SPLENDORS OF TAKEDO CASTLE AWAIT YOU...

MASAMURA...

MASAMURA, I... I'LL REPAY MY DEBT TO YOU!! I DON'T KNOW WHEN, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW, BUT I SWEAR UPON ALL THAT IS SACRED THAT I'LL DO IT SOMEDAY!

HOW TOUCHING... YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE ME WEEP...
C'MON, LET'S GO!! MIZUCHI HAS THINGS TO DO!!

TO BE CONCLUDED IN BOOK 2...

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MAGIC MAN
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